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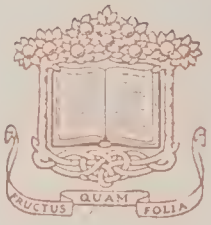
CONTACT AND OTHER STORIES

CONTACT

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

FRANCES NOYES HART



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TO MY FATHER

FRANK BRETT NOYES

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CONTACT AND OTHER STORIES

CONTACT

AND OTHER STORIES

"CONTACT!"

THE first time she heard it was in the silk-hung and flower-scented peace of the little drawing room in Curzon Street. His sister Rosemary had wanted to come up to London to get some clothes—Victory clothes they called them in those first joyous months after the armistice, and decked their bodies in scarlet and silver, even when their poor hearts went in black—and Janet had been urged to leave her own drab boarding-house room to stay with the forlorn small butterfly. They had struggled through dinner somehow, and Janet had finished her coffee and turned the great chair so that she could watch the dancing fire (it was cool for May), her cloudy brown head tilted back against the rose-red cushion, shadowy eyes half closed, idle hands linked across her knees. She looked every one of her thirty years—and mortally tired—and careless of both facts. But she man-

aged an encouraging smile at the sound of Rosemary's shy, friendly voice at her elbow.

"Janet, these are yours, aren't they? Mummy found them with some things last week, and I thought that you might like to have them."

She drew a quick breath at the sight of the shabby packet.

"Why, yes," she said evenly. "That's good of you, Rosemary. Thanks a lot."

"That's all right," murmured Rosemary diffidently. "Wouldn't you like something to read? There's a most frightfully exciting Western novel——"

The smile took on a slightly ironical edge.

"Don't bother about me, my dear. You see, I come from that frightfully exciting West, and I know all about the pet rattlesnakes and the wildly Bohemian cowboys. Run along and play with your book; I'll be off to bed in a few minutes."

Rosemary retired obediently to the deep chair in the corner, and with the smile gone but the irony still hovering, she slipped the cord off the packet. A meagre and sorry enough array; words had never been for her the swift, docile servitors that most people found them. But the thin gray sheet in her fingers started out gallantly enough—"Beloved." Beloved! She leaned far forward, dropping it with deft precision into the glowing pocket

of embers. What next? This was more like; it began: "Dear Captain Langdon" in the small, contained writing that was her pride, and it went on soberly enough, "I shall be glad to have tea with you next Friday—not Thursday, because I must be at the hut then. It was stupid of me to have forgotten you; next time I will try to do better." Well, she had done better the next time. She had not forgotten him again—never, never again. That had been her first letter; how absurd of Jerry, the magnificently careless, to have treasured it all that time, the miserable, stilted little thing! She touched it with curious fingers. Surely, surely he must have cared, to have cared so much for that!

It seemed incredible that she hadn't remembered him at once when he came into the hut that second time. Of course she had only seen him for a moment and six months had passed, but he was so absurdly vivid, every inch of him, from the top of his shining, dark head to the heels of his shining, dark boots—and there were a great many inches! How could she have forgotten, even for a minute, those eyes dancing like blue fire in the brown young face, the swift, disarming charm of his smile, and, above all, his voice—how, in the name of absurdity, could any one who had once heard it ever forget Jeremy Langdon's voice? Even now she

had only to close her eyes, and it rang out again, with its clipped British accent and its caressing magic, as un-English as any Provençal troubadour's! And yet she had forgotten; he had had to speak twice before she had even lifted her head.

"Miss America—oh, I say, she's forgotten me, and I thought that I'd made such an everlasting impression!" The delighted amazement reached even her tired ears, and she had smiled wanly as she pushed the pile of coppers nearer to him.

"Have you been in before? It's stupid of me, but there are such hundreds of thousands of you, and you are gone in a minute, you see. That's your change, I think."

"Hundreds of thousands of me, hey?" He had leaned across the counter, his face alight with mirth. "I wish to the Lord my angel mother could hear you—it's what I'm for ever tellin' her, though just between us, it's stuff and nonsense. I've got a well-founded suspicion that I'm absolutely unique. You wait and see!"

And she had waited—and she had seen! She stirred a little, dropped the note into the flames, and turned to the next, the quiet, mocking mouth suddenly tortured and rebellious.

"No, you must be mad," it ran, the trim writing strangely shaken. "How often have you seen me

—five times? Do you know how old I am? How hard and tired and useless? No—no, a thousand times. In a little while we will wake up and find that we were dreaming."

That had brought him to her swifter than Fate, triumphant mischief in every line of his exultant face. "Just let those damn cups slip from your palsied fingers, will you? I'm goin' to take your honourable age for a little country air—it may keep you out of the grave for a few days longer. Never can tell! No use your scowlin' like that. The car's outside, and the big chief says to be off with you. Says you have no more colour than a banshee, and not half the life—can't grasp the fact that it's just chronic antiquity. Fasten the collar about your throat—no, higher! Darlin', darlin', think of havin' a whole rippin' day to ourselves. You're glad, too, aren't you, my little stubborn saint?"

Oh, that joyous and heart-breaking voice, running on and on—it made all the other voices that she had ever heard seem colourless and unreal——

"Darlin' idiot, what do I care how old you are? Thirty, hey? Almost old enough to be an ancestor! Look at me—no, look at me. Dare you to say that you aren't mad about me!"

Mad about him; mad, mad. She lifted her hands to her ears, but she could no more shut out

the exultant voice now than she could on that windy afternoon.

"Other fellow got tired of you, did he? Good luck for us, what? You're a fearfully tiresome person, darlin'. It's goin' to take me nine tenths of eternity to tell you how tiresome you are. Give a chap a chance, won't you? The tiresomest thing about you is the way you leash up that dimple of yours. No, by George, there it is! Janie, look at me——"

She touched the place where the leashed dimple had hidden with a delicate and wondering finger—of all Jerry's gifts to her, the most miraculous had been that small fugitive. Exiled now, for ever and for ever.

"Are you comin' down to White Orchards next week-end? I'm off for France on the twelfth and you've simply got to meet my people. You'll be insane about 'em; Rosemary's the most beguilin' flibbertigibbet, and I can't wait to see you bein' a kind of an elderly grandmother to her. What a bewitchin' little grandmother you're goin' to be one of these days——"

Oh, Jerry! Oh, Jerry, Jerry! She twisted in her chair, her face suddenly a small mask of incredulous terror. No, no, it wasn't true, it wasn't true—never—never—never! And then, for the first time, she heard it. Far off but clear, a fine

and vibrant humming, the distant music of wings! The faint, steady pulsing was drawing nearer and nearer—nearer still; it must be flying quite high. The letters scattered about her as she sprang to the open window; no, it was too high to see, and too dark, though the sky was powdered with stars, but she could hear it clearly, hovering and throbbing like some gigantic bird. It must be almost directly over her head, if she could only see it.

"It sounds—it sounds the way a humming-bird would look through a telescope," she said half aloud, and Rosemary murmured sleepily but courteously, "What, Janet?"

"Just an airplane; no, gone now. It sounded like a bird. Didn't you hear it?"

"No," replied Rosemary drowsily. "We get so used to the old things that we don't even notice them any more. Queer time to be flying."

"It sounded rather beautiful," said Janet, her face still turned to the stars. "Far off, but so clear and sure. I wonder—I wonder whether it will be coming back?"

Well, it came back. She went down to White Orchards with Rosemary for the following week-end, and after she had smoothed her hair and given a scornful glance at the pale face in the mirror, with its shadowy eyes and defiant mouth, she slipped out to the lower terrace for a breath

of the soft country air. Half way down the flight of steps she stumbled and caught at the balustrade, and stood shaking for a moment, her face pressed against its rough surface. Once before she had stumbled on those steps, but it was not the balustrade that had saved her. She could feel his arms about her now, holding her up, holding her close and safe. The magical voice was in her ears.

"Let you go? I'll never let you go! Poor little feet, stumblin' in the dark, what would you do without Jerry? Time's comin', you cheeky little devils, when you'll come runnin' to him when he whistles! No use tryin' to get away—you belong to him."

Oh, whistle to them now, Jerry—they would run to you across the stars!

"How'd you like to marry me before I go back to-morrow? No? No accountin' for tastes, Miss Abbott—lots of people would simply jump at it! All right, April, then. Birds and flowers and all that kind o' thing—pretty intoxicatin', what? No, keep still, darlin' goose. What feller taught you to wear a dress that looks like roses and smells like roses and feels like roses? This feller? Lord help us, what a lovely liar!"

And suddenly she found herself weeping helplessly, desperately, like an exhausted child, shaken to the heart at the memory of the rose-coloured dress.

"You like me just a bit, don't you, funny, quiet little thing? But you'd never lift a finger to hold me; that's the wonder of you—that's why I'll never leave you. No, not for heaven. You can't lose me—no use tryin'."

But she had lost you, Jerry; you had left her, for all your promises, to terrified weeping in the hushed loveliness of the terrace, where your voice had turned her still heart to a dancing star, where your fingers had touched her quiet blood to flowers and flames and butterflies. She had believed you then. What would she ever believe again? And then she caught back the despairing sobs swiftly, for once more she heard, far off, the rushing of wings. Nearer—nearer—humming and singing and hovering in the quiet dusk. Why, it was over the garden! She flung back her head, suddenly eager to see it; it was a friendly and thrilling sound in all that stillness. Oh, it was coming lower—lower still—she could hear the throb of the propellers clearly. Where *was* it? Behind those trees, perhaps? She raced up the flight of steps, dashing the treacherous tears from her eyes, straining up on impatient tiptoes. Surely she could see it now! But already it was growing fainter—drifting steadily away, the distant hum growing lighter and lighter—lighter still——

"Janet!" called Mrs. Langdon's pretty, patient

voice. "Dinner-time, dear! Is there any one with you?"

"No one at all, Mrs. Langdon. I was just listening to an airplane."

"An *airplane?* Oh, no, dear; they never pass this way any more. The last one was in October, I think——"

The plaintive voice trailed off in the direction of the dining room and Janet followed it, a small, secure smile touching her lips. The last one had not passed in October. It had passed a few minutes before, over the lower garden.

She quite forgot it by the next week; she was becoming an adept at forgetting. That was all that was left for her to do! Day after day and night after night she had raised the drawbridge between her heart and memory, leaving the lonely thoughts to shiver desolately on the other side of the moat. She was weary to the bone of suffering, and they were enemies, for all their dear and friendly guise; they would tear her to pieces if she ever let them in. No, no, she was done with them. She would forget, as Jerry had forgotten. She would destroy every link between herself and the past, and pack the neat little steamer trunk neatly and bid these kind and gentle people good-bye, and take herself and her bitterness and her dulness back to the classroom in the Western university

town—back to the Romance languages. The Romance languages!

She would finish it all that night, and leave as soon as possible. There were some trinkets to destroy, and his letters from France to burn; she would give Rosemary the rose-coloured dress—foolish, lovely little Rosemary, whom he had loved, and who was lying now fast asleep in the next room, curled up like a kitten in the middle of the great bed, her honey-coloured hair falling about her in a shining mist. She swept back her own cloud of hair resolutely, frowning at the candle-lit reflection in the mirror. Two desolate pools in the small, pale oval of her face stared back at her—two pools with something drowned in their lonely depths. Well, she would drown it deeper!

The letters first; lucky that they still used candlelight! It would make the task much simpler—the funeral pyre already lighted. She moved one of the tall candelabra to the desk, sitting for a long time quite still, her chin cupped in her hands, staring down at the bits of paper. She could smell the wall-flowers under the window as though they were in the room; drenched in dew and moonlight, they were reckless of their fragrance. All this peace and cleanliness and ordered beauty—what a ghastly trick for God to have played—to have taught her to adore them, and then to snatch them

away! All about her, warm with candlelight, lay the gracious loveliness of the little room with its dark waxed furniture, its bright glazed chintz, its narrow bed with the cool linen sheets smelling of lavender, and its straight, patterned curtains—oh, that hateful, mustard-coloured den at home with its golden-oak day-bed!

She wrung her hands suddenly in a little hunted gesture. How could he have left her to that, he who had sworn that he would never leave her? In every one of those letters beneath her linked fingers he had sworn it—in every one perjured—false half a hundred times. Pick up any one of them at random——

"Janie, you darling stick, is 'dear Jerry' the best that you can do? You ought to learn French! I took a perfectly ripping French kid out to dinner last night—name's Liane, from the Varietiés—and she was calling me '*mon grand chéri*' before the salad, and '*mon p'tit amour*' before the green mint. Maybe *that'll* buck you up! And I'd have you know that she's so pretty that it's ridiculous, with black velvet hair that she wears like a little Oriental turban, and eyes like golden pansies, and a mouth between a kiss and a prayer, and a nice affable nature into the bargain. But I'm a ghastly jackass—I didn't get any fun out of it at all—because I really didn't even see her. Under the

pink shaded candles to my blind eyes it seemed that there was seated the coolest, quietest, whitest little thing, with eyes that were as indifferent as my velvety Liane's were kind, and mockery in her smile. Oh, little masquerader! If I could get my arms about you even for a minute—if I could kiss so much as the tips of your lashes—would you be cool and quiet and mocking then? Janie, Janie, rosy-red as flowers on the terrace and sweeter—sweeter—they're about you now—they'll be about you always!"

Burn it fast, candle—faster, faster. Here's another for you!

"So the other fellow cured you of using pretty names, did he—you don't care much for dear and darling any more? Bit hard on me, but fortunately for you, Janie Janet, I'm rather a dab at languages, 'specially when it comes to 'cozy names.' *Querida mi alma, douchka, Herzliebchen, carissima,* and *bien, bien-aimée,* I'll not run out of salutations for you this side of heaven—no, nor t'other. I adore the serene grace with which you ignore the ravishing Liane. Haven't you any curiosity at all, my Sphinx? No? Well, then, just to punish you, I'll tell you all about it. She's married to the best fellow in the world, a *liaison* officer working with our squadron—and she worships the ground that he walks on and the air that

he occasionally flies in. So whenever I run up to the City of Light, *en permission*, I look her up, and take her the latest news—and for an hour, over the candles, we pretend that I am Maurice, and that she is Janie. Only she says that I don't pretend very well—and it's just possible that she's right.

"*Mon petit cœur et grand trésor*, I wish that I could take you flying with me this evening. You'd be daft about it! Lots of it's a rotten bore, of course, but there's something in me that doesn't live at all when I'm on this too, too solid earth. Something that lies there, crouched and dormant, waiting until I've climbed up into the seat, and buckled the strap about me and laid my hands on the 'stick.' It's waiting—waiting for a word—and so am I. And I lean far forward, watching the figure toiling out beyond till the call comes back to me, clear and confident: 'Contact, sir?' And I shout back, as restless and exultant as the first time that I answered it: 'Contact!'

"And I'm off—and I'm alive—and I'm free! Ho, Janie! That's simpler than Abracadabra or Open Sesame, isn't it? But it opens doors more magical than ever they swung wide, and something in me bounds through, more swift and eager than any Aladdin. Free! I'm a crazy sort of a beggar, my little love—that same thing in me hungers and thirsts and aches for freedom. I go half mad

when people or events try to hold me; you, wise beyond wisdom, never will. Somehow, between us, we've struck the spark that turns a mere piece of machinery into a wonder with wings; somehow, you are for ever setting me free. It is your voice, your voice of silver and peace, that's eternally whispering 'Contact!' to me—and I am released, heart, soul, and body! And because you speed me on my way, Janie, I'll never fly so far, I'll never fly so long, I'll never fly so high that I'll not return to you. You hold me fast, for ever and for ever."

You had flown high and far indeed, Jerry—and you had not returned. For ever and for ever! Burn faster, flame!

"My blessed child, who's been frightening you? Airplanes are by all odds safer than taxis, and no end safer than the infernal duffer who's been chaffing you would be if I could once get my hands on him. Damn fool! Don't care if you do hate swearing; damn fools are damn fools, and there's an end to it. All those statistics are sheer melodramatic rot; the chap who fired 'em at you probably has all his money invested in submarines, and is fairly delirious with jealousy. Peg (did I ever formally introduce you to Pegasus, the best pursuit-plane in the R. F. C.—or out of it?) Peg's about as likely to let me down as you are! We'd do a good deal for each other, she and I; nobody

else can really fly her, the darling! But she'd go to the stars for me—and farther still. Never you fear—we have charmed lives, Peg and I—we belong to Janie.

"I think that people make an idiotic row about dying, anyway. It's probably jolly good fun, and I can't see what difference a few years here would make if you're going to have all eternity to play with. Of course you're a ghastly little heathen, and I can see you wagging a mournful head over this already—but every time that I remember what a shocking sell the After Life (exquisite phrase!) is going to be for you, darling, I do a bit of head-wagging myself, and it's not precisely mournful! I can't wait to see your blank consternation, and you needn't expect any sympathy from *me.* My very first words will be, 'I told you so!' Maybe I'll rap them out to you with a table-leg!

"What do you think of all this Ouija Planchette rumpus, anyway? I can't for the life of me see why any one with a whole new world to explore should hang around chattering with this one. I know that I'd be half mad with excitement to get at the new job, and that I'd find re-assuring the loved ones (exquisite phrase number two) a hideous bore. Still, I can see that it would be nice from their selfish point of view! Well, I'm no ghost yet, thank God, nor yet are you—but if

ever I am one, I'll show you what devotion really is. I'll come all the way back from heaven to play with foolish Janie, who doesn't believe that there is one to come from. To foolish, foolish Janie, who will still be dearer than the prettiest angel of them all, no matter how alluringly her halo may be tilted or her wings ruffled. To Janie who, Heaven forgive him, will be all that one poor ghost has ever loved!"

Had there come to him, the radiant and the confident, a moment of terrible and shattering surprise—a moment when he realized that there were no pretty angels with shining wings waiting to greet him—a moment when he saw before him only the overwhelming darkness, blacker and deeper than the night would be, when she blew out the little hungry flame that was eating up the sheet that held his laughter? Oh, gladly would she have died a thousand deaths to have spared him that moment!

"My little Greatheart, did you think that I did not know how brave you are? You are the truest soldier of us all, and I, who am not much given to worship, am on my knees before that shy gallantry of yours, which makes what courage we poor duffers have seem a vain and boastful thing. When I see you as I saw you last, small and white and clear and brave, I can't think of anything but the first

crocuses at White Orchards, shining out, demure and valiant, fearless of wind and storm and cold—fearless of Fear itself. You see, you're so very, very brave that you make me ashamed to be afraid of poetry and sentiment and pretty words—things of which I have a good, thumping Anglo-Saxon terror, I can tell you! It's because I know what a heavenly brick you are that I could have killed that statistical jackass for bothering you; but I'll forgive him, since you say that it's all right. And so ghosts are the only thing in the world that frighten you—even though you know that there aren't any. You and Madame de Staël, hey? 'I do not believe in ghosts, but I fear them!' It's pretty painful to learn that the mere sight of one would turn you into a gibbering lunatic. Nice sell for an enthusiastic spirit who'd romped clear back from heaven to give you a pleasant surprise—I *don't* think! Well, no fear, young Janie; I'll find some way if I'm put to it—some nice, safe, pretty way that wouldn't scare a neurasthenic baby, let alone the dauntless Miss Abbott. I'll find——"

Oh, no more of that; no more! She crushed the sheet in her hands fiercely, crumpling it into a little ball; the candle-flame was too slow. No, she couldn't stand it—she couldn't, she couldn't, and there was an end to it. She would go raving mad

—she would kill herself—she would—— She lifted her head, wrenched suddenly back from that chaos of despair, alert and intent. There it was again, coming swiftly nearer and nearer from some immeasurable distance—down—down—nearer still—the very room was humming and throbbing with it, she could almost hear the singing in the wires. She swung far out over the window edge, searching the moon-drenched garden with eager eyes; surely, surely it would never fly so low unless it were about to land! Engine trouble, perhaps, though she could detect no break in the huge, rhythmic pulsing that was shaking the night. Still——

"Rosmary!" she called urgently. "Rosemary, listen—is there a place where it can land?"

"Where what can land?" asked a drowsy voice.

"An airplane. It's flying so low that it must be in some kind of trouble; do come and see!"

Rosemary came pattering obediently toward her, a small docile figure, dark eyes misted with dreams, wide with amazement.

"I must be nine tenths asleep," she murmured gently. "Because I don't hear a single thing, Janet. Perhaps——"

"Hush—listen!" begged Janet, raising an imperative hand—and then her own eyes widened.

"Why—it's *gone!*" There was a note of flat incredulity in her voice. "Heavens, how those things must eat up space! Not a minute ago it was fairly shaking this room, and now——"

Rosemary stifled a yawn and smiled ingratiatingly.

"Perhaps you were asleep, too," she suggested humbly. "I don't believe that airplanes ever fly this way any more. Or it might have been that fat Hodges boy on his motorcycle; he does make the most dreadful racket. Oh, Janet, what a perfectly *ripping* night—do see!"

They leaned together on the window-sill, silenced by the white and shining beauty that had turned the pleasant garden into a place of magic. The corners of Janet's mouth lifted suddenly. How absurd people were! The fat Hodges boy and his motorcycle! Did they all regard her as an amiable lunatic, even little, friendly Rosemary, wavering sleepily at her side? It really was maddening. But she felt, amazingly enough, suddenly quiet and joyous and indifferent—and passionately glad that the wanderer from the skies had won safely through and was speeding home. Home! Oh, it was a crying pity that it need ever land; anything so fleet and strong and sure should fly for ever! But if they must rest, those beating wings—the old R. F. C. toast went singing through

her head and she flung it out into the moonlight, smiling—"Happy landings! Happy landings, you!"

The next day was the one that brought to White Orchards what was to be known for many moons as "the Big Storm." It had been gathering all afternoon, and by evening the heat had grown incredible, even to Janet's American and exigent standards. The smouldering copper sky looked as though it had caught fire from the world and would burn for ever; there was not so much as a whisper of air to break the stillness—it seemed as though the whole tortured earth were holding its breath, waiting to see what would happen next. Everyone had struggled through the day assuring one another that when evening came it would be all right, dangling the alluring thought of the cool darkness before each other's hot and weary eyes; but the night proved even more outrageous than the day. To the little group seated on the terrace, dispiritedly playing with their coffee, it seemed almost a personal affront. The darkness closed in on them, smothering, heavy, intolerable; they could feel its weight, as though it were some hateful and tangible thing.

"Like—like black cotton wool," explained Rosemary, stirred to unwonted resentment. She had spent the day curled up in the largest Indian chair

on the terrace, round-eyed with fatigue and incredulity.

"I honestly think that we must be dreaming," she murmured to her feverish audience; "I do, honestly. Why, it's only *May*, and we never, never—there was that day in August about five years ago that was almost as bad, though. D'you remember, Mummy?"

"It's hardly the kind of thing that one is likely to forget, dear. Do you think that it is necessary for us to talk? I feel somehow that I could bear it much more easily if we kept quite quiet."

Janet stirred a little, uneasily. She hated silence, that terrible empty space waiting to be filled up with your thoughts—why, the idlest chatter spared you that. She hated the terrace, too—she closed her eyes to shut out the ugly darkness that was pressing against her; behind the shelter of her lids it was cooler and stiller, but open eyed or closed, she could not shut out memory. The very touch of the bricks beneath her feet brought back that late October day. She had been sitting curled up on the steps in the warm sunlight, with the keen, sweet air stirring her hair and sending the beech-leaves dancing down the flagged path; there had been a heavenly smell of burning from the far meadow, and she was sniffing it luxuriously, feeling warm and joyous and protected in Jerry's

great tweed coat, watching the tall figure swinging across from the lodge gate with idle, happy eyes—not even curious. It was not until he had almost reached the steps that she had noticed that he was wearing a foreign uniform—and even then she had promptly placed him as one of Rosemary's innumerable conquests, bestowing on him a friendly and inquiring smile.

"Were you looking for Miss Langdon?" Even now she could see the courteous, grave young face soften as he turned quickly toward her, baring his dark head with that swift foreign grace that turns our perfunctory habits into something like a ritual.

"But no," he had said gently, "I was looking for you, Miss Abbott."

"Now will you please tell me how in the world you knew that I was Miss Abbott?"

And he had smiled with his lips, not his eyes.

"I should be dull indeed if that I did not know. I am Maurice Laurent, Miss Abbott."

And "Oh," she had cried joyously, "Liane's Maurice!"

"But yes—Liane's Maurice. They are not here, the others? Madame Langdon, the little Miss Rosemary?"

"No, they've gone to some parish fair, and I've been wicked and stayed home. Won't you sit down and talk to me? Please!"

"Miss Abbott, it is not to you that I must talk. What I have to say is indeed most difficult, and it is to Jeremy's Janie that I would say it. May I, then?"

It had seemed to Jeremy's Janie that the voice in which she answered him came from a great distance, but she never took her eyes from the grave and vivid face.

"Yes. And quickly, please."

So he had told her, quickly, in his exquisitely careful English, and she had listened as attentively and politely, huddled up on the brick steps in the sunlight, as though he were running over the details of the last drive instead of tearing her life to pieces with every word. She remembered now that it hadn't seemed real at all; if it had been to Jerry that these horrors had happened could she have sat there so quietly, feeling the colour bright in her cheeks, and the wind stirring in her hair, and the sunlight warm on her hands? Why, for less than this people screamed, and fainted, and went raving mad!

"You say—that his back is broken?"

"But yes, my dear," Liane's Maurice told her, and she had seen the tears shining in his gray eyes.

"And he is badly burned?"

"My brave Janie, these questions are not good to ask; not good, not good to answer. This I will

tell you. He lives, our Jerry—and so dearly does he love you that he will drag back that poor body from hell itself, because it is yours, not his. This he has sent me to tell you, most lucky lady ever loved."

"You mean—that he isn't going to die?"

"I tell you that into those small hands of yours he has given his life. Hold it fast."

"Will he—will he get well?"

"He will not walk again; but have you not swift feet to run for him?"

And there had come to her, sitting on the terrace in the sunshine, an overwhelming flood of joy, reckless and cruel and triumphant. Now he was hers for ever, the restless wanderer, delivered to her bound and helpless, never to stray again. Hers to worship and serve and slave for, his troth to Freedom broken—hers at last!

"I'm coming," she had told the tall young Frenchman breathlessly. "Take me to him—please let's hurry."

"*Ma pauvre petite*, this is war. One does not come and go at will. God knows by what miracle enough red tape unwound to let me through to you, to bring my message and to take one back."

"What message, Maurice?"

"That is for you to say, little Janie. He told me, 'Say to her that she has my heart; if she needs

my body, I will live. Say to her that it is an ugly, broken, and useless thing; still, hers. She must use it as she sees fit. Say to her—no, say nothing more. She is my Janie, and has no need of words. Tell her to send me only one, and I will be content.' For that one word, Janie, I have come many miles. What shall it be?"

And she had cried out exultantly, "Why, tell him that I say——" But the word had died in her throat. Her treacherous lips had mutinied, and she had sat there, feeling the blood drain back out of her face, out of her heart—feeling her eyes turn black with terror while she fought with those stiffened rebels. Such a little word "Live!"—surely they could say that. Was it not what he was waiting for, lying far away and still, schooled at last to patience, the reckless and the restless? Oh, Jerry, Jerry, live! Even now she could feel her mind like some frantic little wild thing, racing, racing to escape Memory. What had he said to her? "You, wise beyond wisdom, will never hold me—you will never hold me—you will never——"

And suddenly she had dropped her twisted hands in her lap and lifted her eyes to Jerry's ambassador.

"Will you please tell him—will you please tell him that I say—'Contact'?"

"Contact?" He had stood smiling down at her, ironical and tender. "Ah, what a race! That is the prettiest word that you can find for Jerry? But then it means to come very close, to touch, that poor harsh word—there he must find what comfort he can. We, too, in aviation use that word; it is the signal that says—'Now you can fly!' You do not know our vocabulary, perhaps?"

"I know very little."

"That is all then? No other message? He will understand, our Jerry?"

And Janie had smiled—rather a terrible, small smile.

"Oh, yes," she told him. "He will understand. It is the word that he is waiting for, you see."

"I see." But there had been a grave wonder in his voice.

"Would it"— she had framed the words as carefully as though it were a strange tongue that she was speaking—"would it be possible to buy his machine? He wouldn't want any one else to fly it."

"Little Janie, never fear. The man does not live who shall fly poor Peg again. Smashed to kindling-wood and burned to ashes, she has taken her last flight to the heaven for good and brave birds of war. Not enough was left of her to hold in your two hands."

"I'm glad. Then that's all, isn't it? And thank you for coming."

"It is I who thank you. What was hard as death you have made easy. I had thought the lady to whom Jeremy Langdon gave his heart the luckiest creature ever born—now I think him that luckiest one." The grave grace with which he had bent to kiss her hand made of the formal salutation an accolade. "My homage to you, Jerry's Janie!" A quick salute, and he had turned on his heel, swinging off down the flagged path with that swift, easy stride past the sun-dial, past the lily-pond, past the beech trees—gone! For hours and hours after he had passed out of sight she had sat staring after him, her hands lying quite still in her lap—staring, staring—they had found her there when they came back, sitting where Rosemary was seated now. Why, there, on those same steps, a bare six months ago—— Something snapped in her head, and she stumbled to her feet, clinging to the arm of her chair.

"I can't *stand* it!" she gasped. "No, no, it's no use—I can't, I tell you. I——"

Rosemary's arm was about her, Mrs. Langdon's soft voice in her ears, a deeper note from Rosemary's engineer.

"Oh, I say, poor girl! What is it, dear child—what's the matter? Is it the heat, Janie?"

"The heat!" She could hear herself laughing; frantic, hateful, jangling laughter that wouldn't stop. "Oh, Jerry! Oh-h, Jerry, Jerry, Jerry!"

"It's this ghastly day. Let me get her some water, Mrs. Langdon. Don't cry so, Janie—please, please don't, darling."

"I c-can't help it—I c-can't——" She paused, listening intently, her hand closing sharply over Rosemary's wrist. "Oh, listen, listen, there it comes again—I told you so!"

"Thank Heaven," murmured Mrs. Langdon devoutly, "I thought that it never was going to rise this evening. It's from the south, too, so I suppose that it means rain."

"Rain?" repeated Janet vaguely. "Why in the world should it mean rain?" Her small, pale face looked suddenly brilliant and enchanted, tilted up to meet the thunderous music that was swinging nearer and nearer. "Oh, do listen, you people! This time it's surely going to land!"

Rosemary stared at her blankly. "Land? What *are* you talking about, Janie?"

"My airplane—the one that you said was the fat Hodges boy on a motorcycle! Is there any place near here that it can make a landing?"

"Darling child"—Mrs. Langdon's gentle voice was gentler than ever—"darling child, it's this

wretched heat. There isn't any airplane, dear; it's just the wind rising in the beeches."

"The wind?" Janet laughed aloud; they really were too absurd. "Why, Mrs. Langdon, you can hear the *engines*, if you'll only listen! You can hear them, can't you, Mr. Bain?"

The young engineer shook his head. "No plane would risk flying with this storm coming, Miss Abbott. There's been thunder for the last hour or so, and it's getting nearer, too. It's only the wind, I think."

"Oh, you're laughing at me; of course, of course you hear it. Why, it's as clear as—as clear as——"

Her voice trailed off into silence. Quite suddenly, without any transition or warning, she knew. She could feel her heart stand perfectly still for a minute, and then plunge forward in mad flight—oh, it knew, too, that eager heart! She took her hand from the arm of the chair, releasing Rosemary's wrist very gently.

"Yes, of course, it's the heat," she said quietly. She must be careful not to frighten them, these kind ones. "If you don't mind, Mrs. Langdon, I think that I'll go down to the gate to watch the storm burst. No, please, don't any of you come; I'll promise to change everything if I get caught—yes, everything! I won't be long; don't wait for me."

She walked sedately enough until she came to the turn in the path, but after that she ran, only pausing for a minute to listen breathlessly. Oh, yes—following, following, that gigantic music! How he must be laughing at her now, blind, deaf, incredulous little fool that she had been, to doubt that Jerry would find a way! But where could he land? Not in the garden—not at the gates—oh, now she had it—the far meadow. She turned sharply; it was dark, but the path must be here. Yes, this was the wicket gate; her groping fingers were quite steady; they found the latch, released it—the gate swung to behind her flying footsteps. "Oh, Jerry, Jerry!" sang her heart. Why hadn't she worn the rose-coloured frock? It was she who would be a ghost in that trailing white thing. To the right here; yes, there was the hawthorn hedge—only a few steps more—oh, now!

She stood as still as a small statue, not moving, not breathing, her hands at her heart, her face turned to the black and torn sky. Nearer, nearer, circling and darting and swooping; the gigantic humming grew louder—louder still—it swept about her thunderously, so close that she clapped her hands over her ears, but she stood her ground, exultant and undaunted. Oh, louder still—and then suddenly the storm broke. All the winds and the rains of the world were unleashed, and fell

howling and shrieking upon her; she staggered under their onslaught, drenched to the bone, her dress whipping frantically about her, blinded and deafened by that tumultuous clamour. She had only one weapon against it—laughter—and she laughed now, straight into its teeth. And as though hell itself must yield to mirth, the fury wavered—failed—sank to muttering. But Janie, beaten to her knees and laughing, never even heard it die.

"Jerry?" she whispered into the darkness, "Jerry?"

Oh, more wonderful than wonder, he was there! She could feel him stir, even if she could not hear him; so close was he that if she even reached out her hand, she could touch him. She stretched it out eagerly, but there was nothing there—only a small, remote sound of withdrawal, as though someone had moved a little.

"You're afraid that I'll be frightened, aren't you?" she asked wistfully. "I wouldn't be—I wouldn't—please come back!"

He was laughing at her, she knew, tender and mocking and caressing; she smiled back, tremulously.

"You're thinking, 'I told you so!' Have you come far to say it to me?"

Only that little stir; the wind was rising again.

"Jerry, come close—come closer still. What are you waiting for, dear and dearest?"

This time there was not even a stir to answer her; she felt suddenly cold to the heart. What had he always waited for?

"You aren't waiting—you aren't waiting to go?" She fought to keep the terror out of her voice, but it had her by the throat. "Oh, no, no, you can't —not again! Jerry, Jerry, don't go away and leave me; truly and truly I can't stand it—truly!"

She wrung her hands together desperately; she was on her knees to him—did he wish her to go lower still? Oh, she had never learned to beg!

Not a sound, not a stir, but well she knew that he was standing there, waiting. She rose slowly to her feet.

"Very well—you've won," she said hardly. "Go back to your saints and seraphs and angels; I'm beaten. I was mad to think that you ever cared—go back!"

She turned, stumbling, the sobs tearing at her throat; she had gone several steps before she realized that he was following her—and all the hardness and bitterness and despair fell from her like a cloak.

"Oh, Jerry," she whispered, "Jerry, darling, I'm so sorry. And you've come so far—just to find this! What is it that you want; can't you tell me?"

She waited tense and still, straining eyes and ears for her answer—but it was not to eyes or ears that it came.

"Oh, of course!" she cried clearly. "Of course, my wanderer! Ready?"

She stood poised for a second, head thrown back, arms flung wide, a small figure of Victory, caught in the flying wind.

And, "Contact, Jerry!" she called joyously into the darkness. "Contact!"

There was a mighty whirring, a thunder and a roaring above the storm. She stood listening breathlessly to it rise and swell, and then grow fainter—fainter still—dying, dying—dying——

But Janie, her face turned to the storm-swept sky, was smiling at the stars which shone behind it. For she had sped her wanderer on his way—she had not failed him!

THERE WAS A LADY

THERE is one point on which Larry Benedick's best friend and worst enemy and a lot of other less emphatic individuals are thoroughly and cordially agreed. Ask his closest female relative or his remotest business acquaintance or the man who plays an occasional hand of auction with him at the club why Benedick has never married, and they will one and all yield to sardonic mirth, and assure you that the woman who could interest that imperturbable individual has not yet been born—that he is without exception the coldest-hearted, hardest-headed bachelor who has ever driven fluttering débutantes and radiant ladies from the chorus into a state of utter and abject despair—that romance is anathema to him and sentiment an abomination.

"Benedick!" they will chorus with convincing unanimity. "My dear fellow, he's been immune since birth. He's never given any girl that lived or breathed a second thought—it's extremely doubtful if he ever gave one a first. You can say what you please about him, but this you can take as a

fact; you know one man who is going down to the grave as single as the day he was born."

Well, you can take it as a fact if you care to, and it's more than likely that you and the rest of the world will be right. Certainly, no one would ever have called him susceptible, even at the age when any decent, normal young cub is ready to count the world well lost for an eyelash. But not our Benedick—no, long before the gray steel had touched the blue of his eyes and the black of his hair he had apparently found a use for it in an absolutely invulnerable strong box for what he was pleased to call his heart. Then as now, he had faced his world with curled lips and cool eyes—graceful and graceless, spoiled, arrogant, and indifferent, with more money and more brains and more charm and a better conceit of himself than any two men should have—and a wary and sceptical eye for the charming creatures who circled closer and closer about him. The things that he used to think and occasionally say about those circling enchantresses were certainly unromantic and unchivalrous to a degree. Rather an intolerable young puppy, for all his brilliant charm—and the years have not mellowed him to any perceptible extent. Hardly likely to fall victim to the wiles of any lady, according to his worst enemy and his best friend and the world

in general. No, hardly. But there was a lady. . . .

It wasn't yesterday that he first saw her—and it wasn't a hundred years ago, either. It was at Raoul's; if you are one of the large group of apparently intelligent people whose mania consists in believing that there is only one place in the world that any one could possibly reside in, and that that place is about a quarter of a mile square and a mile and and a half long and runs up from a street called Forty-second on an island called Manhattan, you undoubtedly know Raoul's. Not a tea room—Heaven save the mark! Not a restaurant—God forbid! Something between the two; a small room, clean and shabby, fragrant with odours more delectable than flowers. No one is permitted to smoke at Raoul's, not even ladies, because the light blue haze might disturb the heavenly aroma, at once spiced and bland, that broods over the place like a benediction. Nothing quite like it anywhere else in America, those who have been there will tell you; nothing quite like it anywhere else in the world. It costs fine gold to sit at one of the little round tables in the corner, but mere gold cannot pay for what you receive. For to Raoul the preparation of food is an art and a ceremony and a ritual and a science—not a commercial enterprise. The only thing that he purchases with

your gold is leisure in which to serve you better. So who are you to grudge it to him?

Larry Benedick lunched there every day of his life, when he was in New York, heedless of a steady shower of invitations. He lived then in one of those coveted apartments not a stone's throw from Raoul's brown door—a luxurious box of a place that one of the charming creatures (who happened to be his sister-in-law) had metamorphosed into a bachelor's paradise, so successfully that any bachelor should have frothed at the mouth with envy at the mere sight of it.

It had a fair-sized living room, with very masculine crash curtains, darned in brilliant colours, and rough gray walls and an old Florentine chest skillfully stuffed with the most expensive phonograph on the market, and rows and rows of beautifully bound books. There was a deep gray velvet sofa with three Chinese-red cushions in front of the small black fireplace (of course it wasn't possible to light a fire in it without retiring from the apartment with a wet towel tied around the head, crawling rather rapidly on the hands and knees because all the first-aid books state that any fresh air will be near the floor—but what of that? After all, you can't have everything!)—and there were wrought-iron lamps that threw the light at exactly the right angle for reading, and very good English

etchings and very gay Viennese prints in red lacquer frames, and a really charming old Venetian mirror over the mantel. It was a perfect room for a fastidious young man, and Benedick loathed it with an awful loathing.

"All the elusive charm of a window in a furniture shop," he remarked pensively to his best friend—but at least he refrained from destroying the pretty sister-in-law's transports of altruistic enthusiasm, and left it grimly alone, keeping his eyes averted from its charms as frequently as possible, and leaving for South Carolina or northern Canada on the slightest provocation—or else swinging off to Raoul's at twelve o'clock with a feeling of profound relief, when what he fantastically referred to as "business" kept him chained to New York and the highly successful living room.

"Business" for Benedick consisted largely of a series of more or less amicable colloquies with a gray-faced, incisive gentleman in a large, dark, shining office, and the even more occasional gift of his presence at those convivial functions known as board meetings. His father, long dead, had been imprudent enough to sow the wind of financial speculation, and his unworthy son was now languidly engaged in reaping a whirlwind of coupons and dividends. It is painful to dwell on so rudimentary a lack of fair play on the part of

Fate, though Benedick occasionally did dwell on it, with a sardonic grin at the recollection of the modest incomes received by the more prudent and thrifty members of the family. He made what atonement he could for his father's unjustifiable success by a series of astoundingly lavish gifts, however, and wasted the rest of it more or less successfully.

"Business" had kept him in town on that March day when he first saw her. He had arrived at Raoul's doorstep at exactly five minutes past twelve; he lunched early, because he was a disciple of the Continental schedule, and it also avoided interruptions from over-fervent friends who frequented the place. The pretty cashier with her red cheeks and her elaborate Gallic coiffure bestowed her usual radiant smile on him, and Benedick smiled back, with a swift response that many a débutante would have given a large piece of her small soul to obtain. Jules, the sallow and gentle-eyed, pulled out the little round chair with its padded cushions, pushed in the little round table with its threadbare and spotless cloth, and bent forward with pencil poised, the embodiment of discreet and eager interest.

"*Bonjour, monsieur! Monsieur désire?*——"

This, after all, was nearer a home than anything that Larry Benedick had known for many a

weary year—this warm and peaceful corner, with old Jules and young Geneviève spreading friendliness all about him, with Raoul out in the tiled and copper-hung kitchen, alert to turn his skill to service. Monsieur desired? Well, kidneys flamboyant, perhaps—and then some artichokes with Raoul's Hollandaise—and the little curled pancakes with orange and burnt sugar in the chafing-dish. Demi-tasse, of course, and Bénédictine. Not yesterday, you see, that March afternoon!—Jules slipped away, as elated as though he were bearing with him great good tidings, and the brown-and-gray kitten came out from under the table, tapping at the cuff of his trousers with an imperious paw, and he had a smile for it, too. Here in this tranquil space Monsieur had all that he desired, had he not? Surely, all. He bent forward to stroke the pink nose of his enterprising visitor, the smile deepening until the dark face was suddenly young—and the brown door opened and she came in.

Benedick knew quite well that it was a raw and abominable day outside—but he could have sworn that he looked up because the room was suddenly full of the smell of pear blossoms, and lilacs, and the damp moss that grows beside running brooks—and that he felt the sunlight on his hands. There she stood, straight and slim, in her rough

green tweed, with her sapphire-blue scarf and the sapphire-blue feather in the little tweed hat that she had pulled down over the bright wings of her hair, her face as fresh and gay as though she had just washed it in that running brook, her lovely mouse-coloured eyes soft and mischievous, as though she were keeping some amusing secret. There was mud on her high brown boots, and she was swinging a shining new brief case in one bare hand. Benedick stared at that hand incredulously. It wasn't possible that anything real could be so beautiful; velvet white, steel strong, fine and slim and flexible—such a hand Ghirlandaijo's great ladies of the Renaissance lifted to their hearts—such a hand a flying nymph on a Grecian frieze flung out in quest of mercy. And yet there it was, so close to him that if he stretched out his fingers he could touch it!

The owner of this white wonder stood poised for a moment, apparently speculating as to whether this was the most perfect place in the world in which to lunch; she cast a swift glance of appraisal about the shadowed room with its hangings and cushions of faded peacock-blue, with its coal fire glowing and purring in the corner and its pots of pansies sitting briskly and competently along the deep window-sills; she gave a swift nod of recognition, as though she had found something

that she had long been seeking, and slipped lightly into the chair at the table next to Benedick's. Her flying eyes had brushed by the startled wonder of his face as though it had not been there, and it was obvious that he was still not there, in so far as the lady was concerned. She pounced exultantly on the *carte du jour* and gave it her rapt and undivided attention; when Jules arrived carrying Benedick's luncheon as carefully as though it were a delicate and cherished baby she was ready and waiting for him—and Jules succumbed instantly to the hopeful friendliness of her voice.

But certainly, Mademoiselle could have *sole bonne femme* and potatoes allumettes, and a small salad—*oui, oui, entendu—bien fatiguée*, that salad, with a soupçon of garlic in a crust of bread, and the most golden of oils—yes, and a soufflé of chocolate with a demi-tasse in which should be just one dash of cognac—oh, rest assured of the quality of the cognac. Ah, it was to be seen that Mademoiselle was *fine gourmet*—which was, alas, not too common a quality in *ces dames!* Fifteen minutes would not be too long to wait, no? The potatoes —*bon, bon*—Mademoiselle should see. Jules trotted rapidly off in the direction of the kitchen, and Benedick's luncheon grew cold before him while he watched to see what the miracle at the table beside him would do next.

How long, how long you had waited for her, Benedick the cynic—so long that you had forgotten how lovely she would be. After all, it had not been you who had waited; it had been a little black-headed, blue-eyed dreamer, fast asleep these many years—you had forgotten him, too, had you not? He was awake now with a vengeance, staring through your incredulous eyes at the lovely lady of his dreams, sitting, blithe and serene, within hand's touch—the lovely lady who was not too proud to have mud on her boots and who actually knew what to order for lunch. All the girls that Benedick had ever known from the fuzzy-headed little ladies in the chorus to the sleek-locked wives of his best friend and his worst enemy, ordered chicken à la King and fruit salad and indescribable horrors known as maple walnut sundaes and chocolate marshmallow ice cream. But not this lady—oh, not this one! He leaned forward, breathless; what further enchantments had she in store? Well, next she took off her hat, tossing it recklessly across the table, and the golden wings of her hair sprang out alive and joyous, like something suddenly uncaged—and then she was uncaging something else, a shabby brownish red book, prying it out of the depths of the new brief case as though she could hardly wait; he could see from the way that the white hands

touched it that they loved it dearly—that they had loved it dearly for a long, long time. It flew open, as though it remembered the place itself, and she dipped her bright head to it, and was off! Benedick pushed his untouched plate far from him, leaning forward across the table, caution and courtesy and decent reserve clean forgotten. What was she reading that could make her face dance like that—all her face, the gold-tipped lashes and the brave lips, and the elusive fugitive in the curve of the cheek turned toward him, too fleeting to be a dimple—too enchanting not to be one—what in the name of heaven was she reading? If only she would move her hand a little—ah!

Something came pattering eagerly toward him out of the printed page—a small, brisk, portly individual with long ears and a smart waistcoat—his heart greeted it with a shout of incredulous delight. By all that was wonderful, the White Rabbit! The dim room with its round tables faded, faded—Benedick the cynic, Benedick the sceptic, faded with it—he was back in another room, warm with firelight and bright with lamplight, in which a small black-headed boy sat upright in a crib, and listened to a lady reading from a red-brown book—a curly-headed lady, soft-voiced, soft-handed, and soft-eyed, who

for ten enchanted years had read the lucky little boy to sleep; he had never believed in fairy tales again, after that soft voice had trailed off into silence. But now—now it was speaking once more—and once more he believed!

"Oh, the Duchess, the Duchess! Oh, my dear paws! Oh, my fur and whiskers! She'll have me arrested as sure as ferrets are ferrets! Where *can* I have dropped them?"

The little boy was leaning forward, flushed and enchanted.

"Well, but motherie darling, where *could* he have dropped them? Where *could* he have dropped those gloves?"

"*Monsieur désire?*"

Benedick stared blankly at the solicitous countenance, wrenching himself back across the years. Monsieur desired—ah, Monsieur desired—Monsieur desired——

He sat very still after that, until she had sipped the last drop of black coffee out of the little blue cup, until she had pulled the hat down over the golden wings and wrapped the sapphire scarf about her white throat and wedged "Alice" back into the brief case, and smiled at Jules, and smiled at Geneviève, and smiled at the gray kitten, and vanished through the brown door.

He sat even stiller for quite a while after she had gone; and then suddenly bounded to his feet and flung out of the room before the startled

Jules could ask him whether there was not something that he preferred to the untouched Bénédictine.

It was drizzling in the gray street and he turned his face to it as though it were sunshine; he glanced in the direction of the large dark office, and dismissed it with a light-hearted shrug. Business—business, by the Lord! Not while there was still a spot to dream in undisturbed. He raced up the apartment-house stairs three at a time, scorning the elevator, and was in the living room before the petrified Harishidi could do more than leap goggle-eyed from his post by the Florentine chest. Harishidi had obviously been indulging his passion for Occidental music, though you would not have gathered it from the look of horrified rebuke that he directed at the Renaissance treasure's spirited rendition of the "Buzz Town Darkies' Ball." The look conveyed the unmistakable impression that Harishidi had done everything in his power to prevent the misguided instrument from breaking out in this unfortunate manner during his master's absence, but that his most earnest efforts had proved of no avail. Benedick, however, was unimpressed.

"For the love of God, shut off that infernal noise!"

Harishidi flung himself virtuously on the of-

fending treasure, and Benedick stood deliberating for a moment.

"Bring me the records out of the drawer—no, over to the couch—I'm half dead for sleep after that damned party. Get my pipe; the briar, idiot. Matches. This the lot Mrs. Benedick sent?"

Harishidi acknowledged it freely, and Benedick shuffled rapidly through the black disks. Cello rendition of "Eli Eli"; the Smith Sisters in a saxophone medley; highly dramatic interpretation of the little idyll from Samson et Delilah; "Kiss Your Baby and Away We Go" specially rendered by Dolpho, the xylophone king—yes, here it was.

"An Elizabethan Song, sung by Mr. Roger Grahame of the Santa Clara Opera Company."

"Here you are, Hari; put this on your infernal machine. Take the telephone off the hook and give me another of those cushions. Where's an ash tray? All right—let her rip!"

"I play her now?" demanded the incredulous Harishidi.

"You play her now, and you keep right on playing her until I tell you to stop. What's more, if I hear another word out of you, you're fired. All right—what are you waiting for? Go ahead!"

The quiet room was suddenly flooded with grace and gallantry and a gay melancholy; a light

tenor voice singing easily and happily of something that was not joy—and was not sorrow—

"There was a lady, fair and kind,
Was never face so pleased my mind;
I did but see her, passing by,
And yet I love her till I die.
Till—I—die——"

Fair and kind—a lady with gold wings for hair and gray velvet for eyes—a lady who knew what to have for lunch and who read "Alice in Wonderland"—a lady who was tall and slim, and had a mouth like a little girl, and mud on her high boots—white-handed and white-throated—pear blossoms in the sunlight—fair and kind—

"Her gesture, motion, and her smile,
Her wit, her voice, my heart beguile,
Beguile my heart, I know not why,
And yet I love her till I die.
Till—I—die."

Her grace, her voice—a lady who walked as though she were about to dance—a lady who spoke as though she were about to sing—fair and kind—gold and ivory—he had seen her before—she lived in a castle and her hair hung down to her heels—he had ridden by on a black horse and she had thrown him a rose—a castle by the sea—a castle behind a hedge of thorns—a castle in a

dreaming wood—but he had found her and waked her with a kiss—no, no, it was he who had been asleep—a long time—a long time asleep—he wanted to hear the end of the story, but he was so warm and happy, it was hard to keep awake—the firelight made strange shadows. . .

"And so they both lived happily ever after!"
"Then he did find her, Motherie?"
"Of course, of course, he found her, Sleepy Head."
"Ever, ever after, Motherie?"
"Ever, ever after, little boy." . . .

Fair and kind, Golden Hair, smiling in the firelight—smile again—ever after, she said—ever, ever after. . . .

The next day he was at Raoul's at a quarter to twelve, and when Jules asked what Monsieur desired, he told him to bring anything, it made no difference to him! The stupefied Jules departed to the kitchen, where he was obliged to remain seated for several moments, owing to a slight touch of vertigo, and Monsieur sat unmolested in his chair in the corner, his eyes fastened on the brown door as though they would never leave it. He was still sitting there, feverish and preoccupied, half an hour later, having dutifully consumed everything that Jules put before him without

once removing his eyes from the door. It wasn't possible—it wasn't possible that she wouldn't come again. Fate could not play him so scurvy a trick; but let him lay eyes on her just once more, and he would take no further chances with Fate! He would walk up to her the second that she crossed the threshold, and demand her name and address and telephone number and occupation—— And the door opened, and she came in, and he sat riveted to his chair while she bestowed a bunch of violets the size of a silver dollar on the enchanted Geneviève, a smile of joyous complicity on the infatuated Jules, and a rapturous pat on the gray kitten. After a while he transferred his gaze from the door to the table next to him, but otherwise he did not stir. He was thinking a great many things very rapidly—unflattering and derisive comments on the mentality of one Larry Benedick. Idiot—ass! As though any lady who held her bright head so high would not disdain him out of measure if she could get so much as a glimpse into the depths of his fatuous and ignoble mind. Ask her for her address indeed! His blood froze at the thought.

The lady, in the meantime, had ordered lunch and discarded her hat and pried another treasure from the brief case; this time it was brown and larger, and she held it so that Benedick could see

the title without irreparably ruining his eyes. "Tommy and Grizel"—the unspeakable Tommy! She was reading it with breathless intensity, too, and a look on her face that struck terror to his heart, a look at once scornful and delighted and disturbed, as though Tommy himself were sitting opposite her. So this—this was the kind of fellow that she liked to lunch with—a sentimental, posturing young hypocrite, all arrogance and blarney—it was incredible that she couldn't see through him! What magic had this worthless idiot for ladies?

Benedick glared at the humble-looking brown volume as though he would cheerfully rip the heart out of it. He continued to glare until the white hands put it back into the brief case with a lingering and regretful touch, and carried it away through the door; no sooner had it closed than he jammed on his hat and brushed rudely by the smiling Geneviève and out into the wind-swept street. There he paused, staring desperately about him, but the sapphire feather was nowhere to be seen, and after a moment he started off at a tremendous pace for his apartment, where he proceeded to keep his finger on the elevator bell for a good minute and a half, and scowled forbiddingly at the oblivious elevator boy for seven stories, and slammed the door of the living room so

vigorously that the red-lacquered frames leapt on the wall.

He crossed the room in three lengthy strides, and slammed his bedroom door behind him even more vigorously. The bedroom was exactly half the size of the tiled bathroom, so that the artistic sister-in-law had only been able to wedge in a Renaissance day-bed and a painted tin scrap basket—but Benedick found it perfectly satisfactory, as she had permitted him to use books instead of wall-paper. All the ones that she considered too shabby for the living room rose in serried ranks to the high ceiling—Benedick had substituted a nice arrangement of green steps instead of a chair, and had discovered that he could put either these or the scrap basket in the bathroom, if it was necessary to move around. He mounted the steps now, and snatched a brown volume from its peaceful niche on the top shelf next to "Sentimental Tommy," climbed down and sat on the Renaissance day-bed, wrenched the book open so violently that he nearly broke its back, and read about what happened to Tommy on the last few pages—served him damned well right, too, except that hanging was too good for him. Sentiment! Sentiment was a loathsome thing, not to be borne for a moment.

The third time that he read it he felt a little better. and he got up and kicked the scrap basket hard,

and telephoned to the incisive gentleman in the office that he wouldn't be around because he had neuralgia and phlebitis and a jumping toothache, and telephoned his ravished sister-in-law that he'd changed his mind and would be around for dinner at eight if she'd swear to seat him next to a brunette. Subsequently he was so attentive to the brunette that she went home in a fever of excitement—and Benedick ground his teeth, and prayed that somehow his golden lady might know about it and feel a pang of the soft and bitter madness known as jealousy, which is the exclusive prerogative of women. He lay with his head in the pillow on the Renaissance bed most of the night, cursing his idiocy with profound fervour, wondering what insanity had made him think for a moment that he was interested in that yellow-haired girl, and resolving not to go near Raoul's for at least a week. She was probably someone's stenographer—or a lady authoress. Every now and then he slipped off into horrid little dreams; he was building a gallows out of pear trees for a gentleman called Tommy, and just when he had the noose ready, it slipped about his own throat—and he could feel it tightening, tightening, while someone laughed just behind him, very soft and clear—he woke with a shiver, and the dawn was in the room. He wouldn't go to Raoul's for a month. . . .

At five minutes to twelve he crossed the threshold, and she was there already with her hat off and a little fat green-and-gold book propped up against her goblet. Thank God that she had left that brown bounder at home! Benedick stared earnestly, and felt a deeper gratitude to Robert Herrick and his songs than he had ever known before. It was easy to see that she was safe in green meadows, brave with cowslips and violets and hawthorn and silver streams, playing with those charming maids, Corinna and Julia. Benedick breathed a sigh of relief, and when her lunch arrived he was stricken again with admiration at the perfection of her choice. Herrick himself could have done no better; the whole-wheat bread, the primrose pats of butter, the bowl in which the salad lurked discreetly—but he could see the emerald green of cress, and something small and silver and something round and ruddy—radishes and onions shining like jewels! There was a jar of amber honey, a little blue pitcher of thick cream, and a great blue bowl of crimson berries—strawberries in March, with a drift of fresh green mint leaves about them. Here was a lady who was either incredibly wealthy or incredibly spendthrift! She closed her book when Jules put this other pastoral before her, and ate as though it might be a long, long time before she would eat anything again,

though she managed to look as though she were singing all the time. There was a bit of cream left for the kitten, and she fed it carefully, patted its white whiskers, and was gone.

Benedick strolled out thoughtfully, remembering to smile at Geneviève, and feeling more like a good little boy than a ripened cynic. It was incredible how virtuous it made one feel to be happy! He wanted to adopt a yellow dog and give money to a beggar and buy out a florist shop. The florist shop was the only object accessible, and he walked in promptly; the clerk had spoken to him before he realized that he couldn't send her flowers, because he didn't happen to know who she was. He might tell him to send them to the Loveliest Lady in New York, but it was a little risky. However, he bought an armful of daffodils, and a great many rose-red tulips, and enough blue and white hyacinths to fill a garden, and went straight back to his apartment without even waiting for change from the gold piece that he gave to the clerk. He handed them over to the startled Harishidi with the curt order to put them in water; never mind if he didn't have enough vases. Put them in high-ball glasses—finger-bowls—anywhere—he wanted them all over the place. The buyer of flowers then retired and put on a gorgeous and festively striped necktie,

washed his face and hands with a bland and pleasing soap, brushed his black hair until it shone, smiled gravely at the dark face in the mirror, and returned to the sitting room. There he selected a white hyacinth blossom with meticulous care, placed it in his buttonhole, and earnestly requested Harishidi to retire and remain in retirement until summoned.

He spent quite a long time after that, drawing the curtains to shut out the grayness, struggling despairingly over the diminutive fire, piling the cushions so that they made a brilliant nest at one end of the velvet sofa, placing a gold-tooled volume of Aucassin and Nicolette where she could reach it easily—oh, if he could not send his flowers to her, he would bring her to his flowers! He adjusted the reading lamp with its painted parchment shade and dragged a stool up to the sofa. It was his sister-in-law's best find—a broad and solid stool, sedate and comely—he sat there clasping his knees, his cheek against the velvet of the sofa—waiting. After a long time, he drew a deep breath, and smiled into the shadows. He did not turn his head; what need to turn it?

She was there—he could see her sinking far back into the scarlet cushions, greeting his flowers with joyous eyes. She had on a cream-coloured dress of some soft stuff, and a long chain of amber beads;

the lamplight fell on her hair and on her clasped hands—and still he sat there, waiting. What need had they of speech? There was a perfume in her hair—a perfume of springtime, fleeting and exquisite; if he reached out his hand he could touch her. He sat very still; after a little while he felt her hand on his dark head, but still he did not stir—he only smiled more deeply into the shadows, and closed his eyes—— His eyes were still closed when Harishidi came in to ask him if he had forgotten dinner, and his lips were parted, like a little boy lost in a happy dream—in a happy, happy dream. . . .

After that, the days passed by in an orderly and enchanted procession; he watched them bringing gifts to the corner table at Raoul's, feeling warm and grateful and safe; too content to risk his joy by so much as stirring a finger. By and by he would speak to her, of course; in some easy, simple way he would step across the threshold of her life, and their hands would touch, never to fall apart again. She would drop her brief case, perhaps, and he would give it back to her, and she would smile; she would come into some drawing room where he was standing waiting patiently and the hostess would say, "You know Mr. Benedick, don't you? He's going to take you in to dinner." He would go to more dinners—surely she must dine some-

where, and dances—surely she danced! Or the gray kitten might capture that wisp of a handkerchief, and bring it to him as booty—he would rescue it and carry it back to her—and she would smile her thanks—she would smile—— It would all be as simple as that—simpler, perhaps; for the time, he asked no more than to let the days slip by while he sat watching her across the table; that was enough.

Ah, those days! There was the one when she brought out a great volume of Schopenhauer, and laughed all the time she read it; twice she laughed aloud, and so gay and clear was her derision that Jules joined in, too. It was probably the essay on Woman, Benedick decided—the part where he said that ladies were little animals with long hair and limited intelligence. There was the day when she read out of a slim book of vellum about that small, enchanting mischief, Marjorie Fleming, and when Jules put the iced melon down before her she did not see it for almost a minute—her eyes were too full of tears. There was the day when she read "War and Peace" with her hands over her ears and such a look of terror on her face that Benedick had all that he could do to keep from crossing over and putting his arms about her, to close out all the dangers that she feared—even the ones she read about in books.

And suddenly March was over, and it was April, and there was the day when she took a new volume out of the brief case—so new that it still had its paper cover with large black letters announcing that it contained desirable information about Small Country Houses for Limited Incomes, Colonial Style. She read it with tremendous intensity and a look wavering between rapture and despair; once she sighed forlornly, and once she made a small, defiant face at some invisible adversary—and once she patted a picture lingeringly.

After she had gone, Benedick took his sister-in-law's automobile, and drove out to Connecticut, and bought a house—a little old white house with many-paned windows, that sat on a hill with lilac bushes around it, and looked at the silver waters of the Sound. It was perfectly preposterous that she shouldn't have a house if she wanted it, and he was glad that she wanted a small country house, Colonial style, even though it didn't necessarily imply a moderate income. For the first time in his life he was glad that his income was not moderate. When he got back to town he bought a gray roadster—not too heavy, so that she could drive it. She might want to be in and out of town a lot; you never could tell.

He told his sister-in-law that he was going to raise Airedales, because it was impossible

to buy a decent puppy these days, and he discoursed lucidly and affably about a highly respectable Scotch couple that he was going to get to look after the white house and supervise the Airedales. After that he devoted most of his leisure hours to antique shops and auctions, where he purchased any amount of Sheraton furniture and Lowestoft china and Bristol glass and hooked rugs and old English chintzes for the benefit of the Airedale puppies and the Scotch couple. He hadn't as much time as formerly, because he had been growing steadily more uncomfortable at the thought of explaining to those gray eyes and gay lips the undeniable fact that he had twenty-four hours of leisure to dispose of every day of his life; so he had wandered over to the dark office one morning and remarked casually to the gray gentleman at the desk that he might blow in every now and then and see if there was anything around for him to do. It appeared that there was plenty around—so much that he took to blowing in at about nine and blowing out at about five—and he did it not so badly, though a good clerk might have done it better. He continued to spend a generous hour over lunch, however, proving a total loss to the firm for a considerable time after he returned, sometimes in such an abandoned mood that there was a flower in his buttonhole.

And then it was May, and the sapphire feather was gone, and she would come in through the brown door with flowers on her drooping hat and pale frocks tinted like flowers, cool and crisp as dresses in a dream. She still had the brief case, but it was absurd to think that a stenographer would wear such hats; anything so ravishing would cost a year's salary. When he wasn't too busy watching the way her hair rippled back, showing just the tips of her ears, he would wonder whether she were a great heiress with an aversion to jewellery or a successful novelist who had to choose between pearls and Raoul's. He had never seen even the smallest glint of jewels about her; never a gleam of beads at her throat or a brooch at her waist or a ring on her fingers—sometimes he thought that it would be pleasant to slip a long string of pearls about her neck and a band of frosted diamonds about her wrist, to see her eyes widen at their whiteness. Still, this way she was dearer, with flowers for her jewels—better leave the pearls alone—pearls were for tears.

It was incredible how radiant she looked those days; when she came through the door with her flying step and her flying smile the very kitten would purr at the sight of her; her eyes said that the secret that they knew was more delightful and amusing than ever, and her hands were always full of flowers.

And then there was the day that she came in looking so exultant that she frightened him; it wasn't fair that she should look so happy when she didn't know about the house on the hill, or the gray roadster, or the lucky person who was going to give them to her—it wasn't fair and it was rather terrifying. Perhaps it would be better not to wait any longer to tell her about them; she couldn't be disdainful and unkind through all that happiness. Of course he would lead up to it skilfully. He wasn't a blundering schoolboy; he was a man of the world, rather more than sophisticated, with all his wits about him and a light touch. He would catch her eye and smile, deferential and whimsical, and try some casual opening—"Our friend the kitten" or "good old Jules slower than usual—spring turns the best of us to idlers!" and the rest would follow as the night the day—or better still, as the day the night. It mightn't be a bad idea to upset something—his wine glass, for instance; he raised a reckless hand, with a swift glance at the next table—and then he dropped it. She was reading a letter, an incredibly long letter, page after page of someone's office paper covered with thick black words that marched triumphantly across the sheets, and her face was flooded with such eloquent light that he jerked back his head swiftly, as though he had been reading over her

shoulder. He could not speak to her with that light on her face; he sat watching her read it through twice, feeling cold and sick and lonely. He was afraid—he was afraid—he would speak to her to-morrow——

To-morrow came, and with it his lady in a green muslin frock, and a shadowy hat wreathed with lilacs; he noted with a slow breath of relief that she had no brief case, no book, no letters. His coast was clear then at least; this day she had no better comrade to share her table—he would go to her, and ask her to understand. He had risen to his feet before he saw that she had not taken off her hat; she was sitting with her head a little bent, as though she was looking at something on the table, her face shadowed by the drooping hat, her hands clasped before her—and then Benedick saw what she was looking at. There was a ring on her finger, a small, trivial, inconsequential diamond, sparkling in its little golden claw like a frivolous dewdrop; and suddenly she bent her head, and kissed it. He sat down, slowly and stiffly—he felt old. He did not even see her go; it was Jules' voice that made him lift his head.

"*Ah, le printemps, le printemps! V'là la jolie demoiselle qui s'est fiancée.*"

"Yes," said Benedick. "Spring—in spring it is agreeable to have a fiancé."

"Monsieur, perhaps, knows who she is?"

"No," replied Monsieur amiably. "But she is, as you say, a pretty girl."

"She is more than that, if Monsieur pardons. The man whose bride she will be has a little treasure straight from the good God. What a nature—what a nature! Generous as a queen with her silver, but she turns it to gold with her smile. Monsieur has perhaps noted her smile?"

"No," replied Monsieur, still amiably. "Bring me a bottle of the Widow Clicquot, however, and I will drink to her smile. Bring a large bottle so that I can drink often. It might be better to bring two."

He drank both of them under the eyes of the horrified Jules; it took him all of the afternoon and part of the evening to accomplish it, but he won out. All during the hours that he sat sipping the yellow stuff he was driving his mind in circles, round and round over the same unyielding ground, round and round again. It was a hideous mistake, of course; there was nothing irretrievable in an engagement. He could make her see how impossible it was in just a few minutes; it might be a little hard on this other fellow at first, but that couldn't be helped. He hadn't been looking for her, starving for her, longing for her all the days of his life, this other fellow, had he? Probably he had told half-a-dozen girls he loved them—well,

let him find another to tell. But Benedick—whom else had Benedick loved? No one, no one, all the days of his life.

Surely she would see that; surely when he told her about the white house and the gray roadster she would understand that he couldn't let her go. He had been lonely too long—he had been hard and bitter and reckless too long—he would tell her how black and empty a thing was loneliness; when she saw how desperately he needed her, she would stay. When he told her about the two corner cupboards in the low-ceilinged dining room, full of lilac lustre and sprigged Lowestoft, and the painted red chairs in the kitchen, and the little stool for her feet with the fat white poodle embroidered in cross-stitch, she would see all the other things that he had never told her! There was the tarnished mirror with the painted clipper spreading all its sails—he had hung it so that it would catch her smile when she first crossed the threshold; there was the little room at the head of the stairs that the sun always shone into—he had built shelves there himself, and put in all his Jules Verne and R. L. S. and Oliver Optic and Robin Hood and the Three Musketeers and some unspeakably bad ones of Henty; he had been waiting for her to tell him what kind of books little girls read, and then he was going to put them

in, too. Of course she couldn't understand those things unless he told her—to-morrow when she came he would tell her everything and she would understand, and be sorry that she had hurt him; she would never go away again.

At eleven o'clock Jules once more despairingly suggested that Monsieur must be indeed fatigued, and that it would perhaps be better if Monsieur retired. Monsieur, however, explained with great determination and considerable difficulty that he had an extremely important engagement to keep, and that all things considered, he would wait there until he kept it. True, it was not until to-morrow, but he was not going to take any chances; he would wait where he was. Raoul was called in, and expostulated fervently, "*Mais enfin, Monsieur! Ce n'est pas convenable, Monsieur!*"

Monsieur smiled at him, vague and obstinate, and Raoul finally departed with a Gallic shrug, leaving poor Jules in charge, who sat nodding reproachfully in a far corner, with an occasional harrowed glance at the other occupant of the room. The other occupant sat very stiff and straight far into the night; it was toward morning that he made a curious sound, between defeat and despair, and dropped his dark head on his arms, and slept. Once he stirred, and cried desperately: "Don't go—don't go, don't go!"

Jules was at his side in a moment, forgiving and solicitous.

"*Monsieur désire?*"

And Monsieur started up and stared at him strangely—only to shake his head, and once more bury it deep in his arms. It was not Jules who could get what Monsieur desired. . . .

It was late the next morning when he waked and he consumed a huge amount of black coffee, and sat back in his corner, haggard and unshaven, with a withered flower in his buttonhole, waiting for her to come through the door—but she did not come. Not that day, nor the next, nor the next; he sat in his corner from twelve to two, waiting, with a carefully mocking smile on his lips and a curious expression in his eyes, wary and incredulous. He had worked himself into an extremely reasonable state of mind; a state of mind in which he was acidly amused at himself and tepidly interested in watching the curtain fall on the comedy—he blamed a good deal on the spring and a taste for ridiculously unbalanced literature; the whole performance was at once diverting and distasteful. This kind of mania came from turning his back on pleasant flirtations and normal *affaires de cœur;* it was a neatly ironical punishment that the God of Comedy was meting out to pay him for his overweening sense of superiority. Well, it was

merited—and it was over! But he still sat in the corner, watching, and the fourth day the door opened, and she came in.

She had on a gray dress, with a trail of yellow roses across her hat and a knot of them at her waist, and a breeze came in with her. She stood hesitating for a moment in the sunlight, and then she went quickly to where Geneviève sat at her high desk, and stretched out her hands, with a pretty gesture, shy and proud. The sunlight fell across them, catching at a circle above the diamond ring—a little golden circle, very new and bright. Benedick rose to his feet, pushing back his chair—he brushed by her so close that he could smell the roses; he closed the brown door behind him gently and leaned against it, staring down the shining street, where the green leaves danced, joyous and sedate, upon the stunted trees. Well, the curtain had fallen on the comedy; that was over. After a minute, he shrugged his shoulders, and strolled leisurely down to the real-estate agent and sold him the little white house, lock, stock, and barrel, including some rather good china and a lot of old junk that he had picked up here and there. It was fortunate that the young couple from Gramercy Square wanted it; he was willing to let it go for a song. Yes, there was a view of the Sound, and he'd done quite a lot of planting; oh, yes,

there was a room that could be used as a nursery—lots of sun. There was his signature, and there was the end of it—the papers could be sent to his lawyers. He then sauntered over to his sister-in-law's and presented her with the gray roadster; he was about fed up with motoring, and he'd changed his mind about Airedales. Dogs were a nuisance. After a little pleasant banter he dropped in at the club and played three extremely brilliant rubbers of auction, and signed up for a stag theatre party to see a rather nasty little French farce. He didn't touch any of the numerous cocktails—he wasn't going to pay her the compliment of getting drunk again—but he laughed harder than any one at the farce, and made a good many comments that were more amusing than the play, and his best friend and his worst enemy agreed that they had never seen him in such high spirits.

He went back to the apartment humming to himself, and yawned ostentatiously for Harishidi's benefit, and left word not to wake him in the morning—and yawned again, and went to bed. He lay there in the blackness for what seemed hours, listening to his heart beat; there was a tune that kept going round in his head, some idiotic thing by an Elizabethan—"Fair and kind"—he must go lighter on the coffee. "Was never face so pleased my mind——" Coffee played the deuce with your

nerves. "Passing by——" Oh, to hell with it! He stumbled painfully out of bed, groping his way to the living room, jerking on the light with a violence that nearly broke the cord. One o'clock; the damned clock must have stopped. No, it was still ticking away, relentless and competent. He stood staring about him irresolutely for a moment, and then moved slowly to the Florentine chest, fumbling at the drawer. Yes, there it was—"An Elizabethan Song, Sung by Mr. Roger Grahame"—"There was a lady, fair and kind"—There was a lady—— He flung up the window with a gesture of passionate haste, and leaning far out, hurled the little black disk into deeper blackness. Far off he heard a tinkling splinter from the area; he closed the window, and pulled the cord on the wrought-iron lamp, and stumbled back to the Renaissance bed.

He was shaking uncontrollably, like someone in a chill, and he had a sickening desire to weep—to lay his hot cheek against some kind hand, and weep away the hardness and the bitterness and despair. Loathsome, brain-sick fool! He clenched his hands and glared defiance to the darkness, he who had not wept since a voice had ceased to read him fairy tales a long time ago. After eternities of staring the hands relaxed, and he turned his head, and slept.

He woke with a start—there was something salt and bitter on his lips; he brushed it away fiercely, and the clock in the living room struck four. After that he did not sleep again; he set his teeth and stared wide-eyed into the shadows—he would not twice be trapped to shame. He was still lying there when the sun drifted through the window; he turned his face to the wall, so that he would not see it, but he did not unclench his teeth. . . .

It was June, and he took a passage for Norway, and tore it up the day that the boat sailed. There was a chance in a thousand that she might need him, and it would be like that grim cat Fate to drop him off in Norway when he might serve her. For two or three days she had been looking pale; the triumphant happiness that for so long she had flaunted in his face, joyous and unheeding, was wavering like the rose-red in her lips. It was probably nothing but the heat; why couldn't that fool she had married see that she couldn't stand heat? She should be sitting somewhere against green pines, with the sea in her eyes and a breeze lifting the bright hair from her forehead.

She never read any more. She sat idle with her hands linked before her; it must be something worse than heat that was painting those shadows under her eyes, that look of heart-breaking patience about her lips. And Benedick, who had flinched

from her happiness, suddenly desired it more passionately than he had ever desired anything else in his life. Let the cur who had touched that gay courage to this piteous submission give it back —let him give it back—he would ask nothing more. How could a man live black enough to make her suffer? She hardly touched the food that was placed before her; Jules hovered about her in distress, and she tried to smile at him—and Benedick turned his eyes from that smile. She would sit very quiet, staring at her linked hands with their two circles, as though she were afraid to breathe—she, to whom the air had seemed flowers and wine and music. Once he saw her lips shake, terribly, though a moment later she lifted her head with the old, valiant gesture, and went out smiling.

Then for a day she did not come—for another day—for another—and when once more she stood in the door, Benedick felt his heart give a great leap, and stand still. She was in black, black from head to foot, with a strange little veil that hid her eyes. She crossed the room to her table, and sat down quietly, and ordered food, and ate, and drank a little wine. After Jules had taken the things away she still sat there, pressing her hands together, her lips quite steady—only when she unlinked them, he saw the faint red crescents where the nails had cut.

So that was why she had had shadows painted beneath her eyes; he had been ill, the man who had given her the rings; he had died. It would be cruel to break the hushed silence that hung about her with his clumsy pity, but soon he would go to her and say, "Do not be sad. Sadness is an ugly thing, believe me. I cannot give you what he gave you, perhaps, but here is the heart from my body. It is cold and hard and empty; take it in your hands, and warm it. My need of you is greater than your need of him—you can not leave me." He would say that to her, after a little while.

The gray kitten touched her black skirt with its paw, and she caught it up swiftly, and laid her cheek against its fur. It was no longer the round puff that she had first smiled on, but it was still soft—it still purred. She put it down very gently, and rose, looking about her as on that first day; at the place where the fire had burned in the corner, at the pansies, jaded and drooping in their green pots; once again her eyes swept by Benedick as though he were not there. They lingered on Geneviève for a moment, and when they met Jules' anxious, faithful gaze she parted her lips as though to speak, and gave it up with a little shake of her head, and smiled instead—a piteous and a lovely smile—and she was gone. . . .

He never saw her again. That was not a hundred years ago—no, and it was not yesterday; the steel has come into his hair and his eyes since then, but sometimes he still goes to Raoul's to lunch, and sits at the corner table, where he can see the brown door. Who can tell when it might open and let in the spring—who can tell what day might find her standing there once more, with her gay eyes and her tilted lips and the sunlight dancing in her hair?

Benedick's best friend and his worst enemy and the world and his pretty sister-in-law are very wise, no doubt, but once—once there was a lady——
He never touched the tip of her fingers, but she was the only lady that Benedick ever loved.

LONG DISTANCE

DEVON snapped the stub of his cigarette into the fire with a movement of amused impatience, his fingers more eloquent than his thin, impassive countenance.

"Nothing, was it?"

"No, nothing—that unspeakable wind." Anne Carver gave a last reluctant glance over her shoulder into the shadowed hall, and pulled the door to behind her, turning her face to the warm, bright room with a rueful smile. "I'm sorry, Hal; it's outrageous of me—right in the middle of that thrilling story, too."

In spite of her slim height and the sophisticated skill with which she had wound her velvety black hair about her small head—in spite of the length of filmy train that swept behind her, she looked like some charming and contrite child as she came slowly across the room to the deep chintz chair and the dancing warmth of the fire.

"But it's nonsense, my dear girl; sheer, unmitigated nonsense! Here you are spoiling what might have been a delightful evening by working your-

self up into a magnificent state of nerves, and over what, I ask you? Over nothing, over less than nothing! Poor old Derry telephones that he won't be able to get out to-night because he's been dragged in on some fool party, and you apparently interpret it into meaning that you're never going to lay eyes on him again in this world. You've been restless as a witch all evening—every time a door's slammed or a latch has rattled you've fairly leapt out of your skin; and permit me to inform you that you're getting me so that I'm about to start leaping, too. Nice, cheerful atmosphere for the stranger within your gates, my child."

"I'm awfully sorry, Hal. I'll be good, truly. It's only that——"

"Only what, for the love of Heaven? You aren't expecting him back to-night, are you?"

"Well, of course, I know that he said he couldn't possibly manage it, but he might—he can manage anything. And he wanted so dreadfully to see you; it's been years, hasn't it?"

"Three," replied Devon concisely.

"Well, you see! And of course he'd want to see *me* dreadfully, because it's been years since he's seen me, too; we have breakfast at half-past seven. Isn't that hideous? It takes him an hour to get into town; I do hate that. A whole hour away—think of it——"

"Anne, I blush for you; I do indeed. It's embarrassing for any well-behaved bachelor to hear you talk. It's sinful to lavish that amount of devotion on any man that lives."

"Not on Derry." The clear face was a little flushed, but the shining eyes met his unwaveringly. "You lavish it, too, Hal! I used to be bored to distraction by the tales that you'd pour out for hours on end about the fabulous student who was on his way back from Paris to spread havoc amongst the maidens of America. I used to laugh at you—remember?"

"Of course I remember." The dark, ironic face was suddenly touched with a very charming smile. "That first evening that I brought him over after supper, and he talked until a quarter to one until he had everyone as excited as he was about things that we actually wouldn't give a snap of our fingers for; I can see him standing by the mantel now, with every golden hair on his head ruffled up, and those crazy sherry-coloured eyes of his half mad with excitement, ranting like a Frenchman and laughing like a lunatic—I can see you with your face tilted up to him, forgetting that any of the rest of us were alive—— You had on a gray dress and someone had sent you white flowers, and you were wearing a long string of green beads that hung to your knees——"

"Hal, you're making that up! Four years——"

"Is four years too long to remember green beads and white flowers? Perhaps you're right! But it isn't too long to remember Derry's voice when he told us about the night that he and the drunken cab driver spent in the Louvre, is it? Shades of Gargantua, how that kid could laugh! After all, there's never been any one else just like him, has there?"

"Not ever—oh, not ever. It's the cruellest shame that he couldn't be here now; he'd love it so, and you could have such a beautiful time reminiscing—oh, I can't bear having him away on a night like this. When I went to the door just then those trees by the gate were straining like dogs on a leash, and the wind had wrenched a great branch off the lilac bush. I do hate November! And the rain like gray floods—and so *cold*, Hal. He oughtn't to be out in that, truly. He ought to be here where he could play with us, where it's warm and kind and—safe. Do you suppose they were motoring?"

"I don't suppose anything at all. My dear girl, you aren't going to start that all over again?"

"Ah, it's frightfully silly, I know. Old married people—three-year-old married people—they oughtn't to mind things like that. But it's the first time that he's been away all night, and I'm—oh, I'm ridiculous. Scold me, scold me hard!"

"You're a very difficult person to scold, all things considered. It's those unprincipled eyelashes, probably. First time in three years, honestly, Anne? Good Lord, it's unbelievable!"

"*Hal!*"

"Well, but my good child! Long Island and the twentieth century and the tottering state of holy matrimony—it's simply defying the laws of gravity! Do you sit here hanging the crane every night of your lives?"

"Oh, Hal, you lovely idiot! Of course we don't; we go out any amount and have people here a lot, and go in town, too. Only we happen to like each other—rather—and to like to play together—rather—so we just go ahead and do it. It's simply happened that up to now nothing turned up that we couldn't do together; *of course* it was bound to happen sooner or later. Of course I know that, Hal." She leaned forward, the firelight painting flying shadows on the vivid, high-bred little face. "But I'm an utter goose about Derry. I feel *empty* when he isn't around, and I don't care who knows it."

"A bit hard on the rest of us, isn't it? Still, if it's the same Derry that I practically bestowed on you at the altar I'm rather inclined to get your point of view. Not changed for the worse?"

"Changed for the better, thank you!" laughed

Derry's wife. "Better and better and better every minute, once removed from your sinister influence." She smiled her gay affection at him, and then suddenly the smile wavered, faded—she sprang to her feet, trailing her blue-green draperies over to the long window.

"Don't you *hate* that noise, Hal? No, listen. The rain's out to drown the world, and that wind——" She shivered, staring out into the menacing blackness, raging like a wild beast on the other side of the lighted window. "Poor Hal, it's going to be simply awful for you! It's a good ten minutes' walk to the club, and these back roads turn into mud soup if it even showers! I do think it's a wicked shame."

"Perhaps I'd better be getting on my way——"

"No, no!" There was a note of sheer panic in her voice, though she laughed it down valiantly. "Why, it can't be eleven, and he isn't going to call up till twelve. You simply have to entertain me; I won't be abandoned yet. No, I mean it. Let's start again—about Brazil. You were telling me about Brazil——"

"You aren't even remotely interested in Brazil," he accused. "But I'll talk to you about any place from Peoria to Patagonia, if you'll stop wandering about like a lost soul, and come back to the fire, like a good child."

"Yes," replied the good child obediently, dropping the curtain. "Does—does it seem cold to you in here, Hal?"

"Cold? It's heavenly warm; if I were a cat I'd purr for you."

"It feels—cold, to me," said Anne Carver, spreading her hands before the leaping flames. "As though the wind had got in through the window somehow, and into my blood—and into my bones——"

"Nonsense," said Devon sharply. "You got chilled standing over there; you're an unconscionable goose, and I'm beginning to be strongly out of patience with you. Sit down and put your feet on the fender—want something over your shoulders?"

She shook her head, holding her hands closer to the fire.

"No, please—I'd rather not sit down just yet. It was the window, of course. Don't be cross; I do want to hear the rest of that about Brazil. Some day I'm going there; some day I'm going to find a country where there's no such time as autumn—no such month as November, full of dead leaves, and wind and cold—and emptiness. Tell me what's prettiest there; there must be so many pretty things? Birds with shining feathers—butterflies like flowers—flowers like butterflies—

gold like sunshine and sunshine like gold—oh, I'm warmer just for thinking of it! Tell me what was prettiest?"

"I saw nothing half so pretty as a lady with the lamplight falling about her, bending over pansies black as her hair in a bowl green as her eyes."

"Oh!" She straightened swiftly, giving the flowers a last friendly touch, and facing him, lightly flushed, lightly reproachful. "*Green*, Hal? That's not pretty at all—and it stands for something shameful."

Devon raised quizzical eyebrows.

"Never felt the honest pangs of jealousy, Anne?"

"But how could I, even if I were capable of such cheapness and ugliness? I've never in my life cared for any one but Derry."

"And Derry, lovely lady, would never give you cause?"

"*Derry?*" The startled incredulity of that cry rang into clear mirth. "Why, Hal, it may be difficult for you to believe, but Derry *loves* me."

Devon tapped the ashes off his cigarette, and sat staring for a moment at the reddened tip.

"It doesn't precisely strain my credulity to the breaking point," he replied drily. "No, I can imagine that Derry might love you. It hardly requires any colossal stretch of imagination on my

part, either. I've loved you myself for thirteen years."

"Hal!"

"Loved you with every drop of blood in my body. There's no use looking stricken and melodramatic, Anne. I've never worried you much about it, have I?"

"No," she whispered voicelessly.

"No. Well, then, don't worry me about it now, there's a good girl. I'm off for Ceylon to-morrow, and I haven't the most remote intention of making a nuisance of myself to-night. You don't have to remind me of the fact that Derry's my best friend, that I was his best man, that you are his wife. I have an excellent memory for such trifling details myself. It's only fair to add, however, that I wouldn't give a tuppenny damn for the whole collection if it weren't for one other."

"Which other?" she asked, her eyes meeting his steadily, infinitely gentle and remote.

"The rather important one that you're happy," replied Devon evenly. "I came all the way back from Brazil to find out whether he was making you happy—and now I'm off to-morrow."

"Happy is a poor word for what he has made me," she said. "You should have known that, you who know Derry. Oh, Hal—oh, Hal, how could you?"

"It isn't done, I know," he assented. "It's always the cad and the villain who is caught out making love to his friend's wife at all hours of the night. But there's a slight distinction in my favour, you see; I am loving you, not making love to you."

"You're hurting me," she told him. "Pretty badly."

"You have no right to be hurt. It's nothing ugly that I am giving you. Out of pain and bitterness and despair I've wrought something rather fine; it isn't like you to disdain it, my dear. Ever since you were a little girl with dark braids swinging to your waist, I've brought you presents; every corner of the earth I've ransacked just to have you touch those gifts with your fingers, and say, 'That's lovely, Hal—that's lovely'—and smile. The only thing worth giving you was not in my power to bestow, but I wanted to make sure that you had it, no matter whose hands had held it out to you Happiness is yours, Anne—I have nothing left to give you but my love. I swear to you that there is not one thing in it that gives you the right to say that it hurts you. Believe me, you can take it in your hands—and smile."

"Yes. Yes, Hal." She smiled at him, grave and misty-eyed—and he smiled back.

"Then that's about all, my dear, and I'll be

going. It's no hour at all for a poor bachelor to be awake. Good-night, Anne; sweet dreams to you."

"Hal, I don't want you to go—please, I don't want you to go." There was something so desperate in her low entreaty that he halted with lifted brows. "I know that it's utterly foolish and unreasonable—and—and selfish, but I simply can't bear to be left here alone until Derry calls me up. Please, please don't leave me."

"Very well." He turned back to his chair slowly. "This isn't like you, you know."

"I know." She sat staring down at her locked fingers. "It isn't a bit like me; I haven't any nerves at all, as a rule—not enough to make me sympathetic even. Derry says my lack of imagination is simply appalling—that unless I can see a thing or touch it or taste it or smell it or hear it, I simply won't believe that it exists—that I don't really believe that the world's round, because it looks flat to me! He laughs about it, but I do honestly think that it worries him."

"It generally worries Derry when someone doesn't see things his way." Devon smiled reminiscently.

"Well, you know how *he* is. He fully believes that they're trying to signal to us from Mars, and he almost goes wild because no one pays any at-

tention to the signals! He thinks that phonographs are much more incredible than Ouija boards, and that telephones are far more extraordinary than telepathy. It wouldn't be any effort to Derry to believe that the world was shaped like a hat-box, with blue and green stripes and a nice little handle to carry it around!"

"You must be a great trial to him, Madame Materialist."

"Oh, he wrings his hands over me. He says for any one to seem as spiritual and be as literal as I am is nothing more nor less than a swindle. Oh, oh, if he could see me to-night!"

"But will you be good enough to tell me what in the name of Heaven *is* the matter with you to-night?"

"I don't know; I don't know." She drew a long breath, making a piteous effort to smile. "I'm—frightened."

"Frightened of *what?*"

"I don't know, I tell you." She glanced about her with a long, despairing shiver. "Of the night—of the world—of the room—of—of everything."

"The room! You know when you talk like that, Anne, you make me seriously consider ringing up a doctor. I don't believe that all America holds a more delightful room—gayer or kinder or more friendly; it's nothing short of a miracle what

you've done to this old barn! It's the most reassuring room I've ever set my foot in; you know, when you come into it with its fires and flowers and lights, you can almost hear it singing and laughing to itself, 'Here—here dwells happiness.'"

"Oh, yes, you're right—it has been happy." Her eyes strayed over its treasures; the shelves warm and bright with books, with the beloved Lowestoft standing like flowers against the panelled cream of the walls, the lustre gleaming in blue and copper bravery along the firelit mantel, the glazed chintz holding out its prim nosegays proudly for all to see—the English prints on the walls echoing the gay warmth of the hooked rugs on the floor—she brought her haunted eyes back to Devon.

"It's a pretty room," she said in a strange little voice. "I do think it's quite a pretty room. But do you know what it looks like to me to-night? To-night it looks to me like a corpse that someone had dressed in a flowered frock and a ribboned hat."

"Anne!" His voice cracked out like a whip. "Now that's enough; you're to pull yourself together at once, or I'm going to call up the doctor. That's an abominably morbid thing to say—it's simply not healthy. I'm not joking, my dear; I have every intention of calling him up if you haven't yourself in hand in the next five minutes."

He leaned across to the table, drawing the shining black instrument closer toward him.

"D'you think I'm sick?" she asked piteously. "You know, I do think I must be sick. I'm so—I'm so dreadfully cold."

"Here——" He rose abruptly. "Where's your scarf?"

"No—no—it isn't a scarf I want. I'm cold inside, dreadfully, dreadfully. It isn't a scarf."

"You're worrying me badly, Anne. Look here, what is it? This party of Derry's, honestly?"

"Yes, the party. It's foolish, I know; I know—don't say it, please—I know."

"Well, but what about it? Did Derry seem worried himself? Did he sound upset?"

"No. He sounded—casual. As casual as—as casual as——" She made a little despairing gesture with her hand. "I can't tell you how casual he sounded."

"Well, then——"

"Well, then, but that's it, Hal. Derry isn't a bit a casual person, and here were you for the first time in three years—and here was I, and he knows how I loathe being left alone out here with the maids—and he sounded as though it were—nothing. Just nothing at all."

"And is this honestly the mole-hill out of which you've built your mountain?"

"No—I don't know; I can't even explain it to myself—how could I explain it to you? It wasn't anything tangible at first. Just a feeling of—of discomfort—something vague and not pleasant; I couldn't even put my finger on it. I told myself that I was being silly and unreasonable—I did indeed. You mustn't think that I enjoy this kind of thing. I hate it, I hate it."

"But I'm so utterly at sea to account for this, my dear, and I want to help you. You're tormenting yourself about something real if we could only put our finger on it. Something that Derry said or did that worried you; you can't make me believe that you've manufactured all of this out of thin air! It's too unlike you—why, ever since that first day I met you, a pale mite of a thing with great eyes and long braids, brave and proud and gentle in the midst of the rest of those young hoydens, I've found you exquisitely fair and adorably, adorably reasonable. No one's ever been like you, Anne; you mustn't wreck my world by showing me little clay feet to-night."

"Trying to flatter me into being a good child? That's dear of you, but oh, I'm beyond flattery. I'm making up for any past arrears of reason to-night, I promise you."

"Well, then, let's try to get to the bottom of it—

hunt the good old subconscious into the open! Now what exactly was this famous telephone conversation, word for word?"

She turned her head restlessly.

"Oh, Hal, what does it matter? Very well—only I've told you once, you know. He said, 'I'm awfully sorry, dear, but I won't be able to get out this evening. Tell Hal that I'm sorry as the dickens, but that we can have lunch at the office to-morrow; one sharp. That'll give him plenty of time to get off again on his globe-trotting.' And I said, 'But what time will you get out?' He said, 'Six-thirty to-morrow, as usual. I may bring Joe Carey along with me.' I was so surprised that I almost lost my voice, Hal, and I said, 'Why, Derry, not *to-night?*' And he just laughed, and said, 'No; I've been roped in on the darnedest party you ever heard of—got to run now, or I'd explain. I can't possibly get out of it. You'll be awfully amused when I tell you. It's a good joke on me!' I said, 'But where are you going?' And Derry said, 'Lord knows! I've got to run, honestly, dear. Tell you what I'll do: I'll call you up when it's over, and let you in on the whole blooming thing. It's too good to sleep on; wait till you hear! It may be late—will you be awake at twelve?' And I said, 'I'll be awake at six if you don't call up. Promise, Derry.' And he said, 'Promised! Not later than

twelve. Give Hal my best—see you both tomorrow.' And—he rang off."

"That was absolutely all there was to it?"

"Absolutely all."

"Very well. I'll bet you five thousand dollars to a pansy, Lady Tragedy, that the midnight expedition runs somewhat on these lines. Mr. Jabez K. Rugg from Omaha, Nebraska, blows into our Derry's office late this afternoon with an interesting proposition. He has heard that he is the most promising young architect in America, and as he is desirous of presenting his third wife with a cross between a Moorish palace and a French château for a little anniversary surprise he has applied to Derry for some sound advice, for which he is willing and eager to disburse colossal sums. Time presses, however, and the worthy Mr. Rugg yearns to invest his precious hours in New York both profitably and pleasantly. He suggests that the promising young architect put on his hat, lock up his office, and sally forth into the night, which they will spend together, chattering of business and painting the unfortunate town a brilliant red. He doesn't happen to know the ropes, but he has a really touching confidence in our Derrick. And our Derrick, fired with the desire to hang pearls about your neck and sables about your shoulders, wafts a good-night kiss to the pleasant anticipa-

tion of firelight and candlelight, and sallies forth into what the poet refers to as 'the lights of old Broadway.' And there you are! Please pick me out a nice pansy."

"That's all very clever and amusing, Hal, but it isn't especially convincing. And it doesn't relieve me any more than if someone tried to cheer things up by doing a fox-trot to the funeral march. You needn't scowl; it doesn't. If it was as simple as that, why didn't he explain it at the time?"

"My dear child, he was evidently in a tearing hurry—he'd have had to go into elaborate explanations to make it clear, and he obviously wasn't in any position to indulge in the luxury of explanations. The impetuous Mr. Rugg may have been clamouring at the door, or tooting his horn underneath the window. At any rate, he's going to call you up in a bare half hour, and clear up the whole thing; he's apt to keep his word, isn't he?"

"*Apt* to?" she echoed scornfully. "He'd keep his word if the world came to an end. I thought that you knew him."

At the disdain in her voice something violently resentful flared in the dark eyes that met hers.

"Why, so did I," he returned evenly. "But apparently I was mistaken. The Derry I knew was not a plaster saint, you see!"

"Nor is the Derry that I know—plaster." Her

voice shook, but she held her head very high. "Are you trying to make me mistrust him, Hal? Be careful, please; you are only making me mistrust you."

"Oh, good God!" He flung at her a look of such revolt and despair that the small frozen face softened. "Look here, don't—don't let's make more of a mess of this. You can't believe that kind of thing of me, Anne; you may know Derry, but you've known me longer, after all. I'd cut my throat before I'd try to come between you two. Derry's worth a thousand of me, of course—I know. He's made you happy, and nothing that I could do in this life or the next would ever repay him for that. But just for a moment it galled me hideously to have you lavishing that flood of adoration on any man that lived: it was a flick on a raw wound, and something deep in me yelled out rebellion. You think jealousy a cheap and ugly thing, you say—well, now you know just how cheap, just how ugly it can be!"

"Ah, I'm sorry——" She leaned to him, all gentleness once more. "I'm sorry that I was hateful; it's nothing but these unspeakable nerves, truly. Let's forget it all, shan't we? Do you think it's letting up a little outside? It doesn't sound quite so—so savage, does it?" As though resentful of her waning terror, the beast outside

flung itself at them once more, pouncing on the house with a long and terrible roar, shaking it in its monstrous claws as though it would rattle the flimsy barriers of wood and glass out of their cracking frames. She shrank deeper into the chair with a tremulous laugh. "Oh, no, it's incredible—no, *listen* to it. I'll wager that it's literally tearing trees up by the roots and——" She broke off tensely. "Hal, you don't think that it could damage the wires, do you?"

"No, no; nonsense! It sounds a great deal worse than it is; this house is nothing but a rattletrap, I tell you. It takes a worse storm than this to put a telephone out of commission."

"If he doesn't telephone, I can't bear it," she said softly. "That's not rhetoric. I simply can't bear it."

"Well, we can settle that," said Devon briefly. "I'll get Central and——"

The telephone that he reached for suddenly gave a faint jangle—a small, far-off warning of sound—and then it rang aloud, sharp and imperative.

"Oh, *Hal!*" Her voice was an exultant quiver. "No, no, give it to me; he's early, isn't he? It's not nearly twelve, is it? Yes—yes, this is Mrs. Carver—this is Anne, darling——" The thrilled voice wavered and flagged. "Oh—oh, I'm sorry; you must have the wrong number. . . . Yes,

it's Mrs. Carver—Mrs. Derrick Carver. No, but it's a mistake. . . . No, no one's been using the wire this evening; no, it hasn't rung at all. I've been rather expecting a call, but the wire's been perfectly clear since nine. . . . What? . . . I can't hear—there's a singing on the wires. . . . What? . . . . . No, the receiver hasn't been off; I'm sorry that you've had so much trouble getting us, but I really think that there's some mistake—perhaps the maids——" She bit her lip, with a glance of despairing amusement at Devon. "Why, yes, it's possible that someone else has been trying to get a call through to me, but none has come through. . . . Yes, it might have been long distance. . . . What? You've been trying for an hour? Well, that really isn't my fault, is it? If you'll tell me what you want. . . . I can't hear; please speak a little louder. . . . No, it doesn't make any difference whether any one else is here or not, you can give the message to me. I'm quite as capable of hearing what you have to say as any one else. . . . No, I most certainly will not; please tell me what you want, or I shall simply ring off. . . . Yes. Yes. I can hear. . . . Oh, its *Headquarters*. Well, you can tell for yourself that the telephone's not working well; there's that singing on the wires and every now and then it

buzzes, too. I suppose it's this storm; I'm so glad you're working on it. Do see if there's not something that you can do; I *am* expecting an important call any minute. Can't one of your men? . . . Well, then, what on earth did you call up for? I do think that this service—— *Oh*——" Her voice died suddenly in her throat, and at the look in her eyes Devon leapt to his feet.

"Here, Anne—give it to me!"

She shook her head, fighting desperately to get back her voice.

"No, no—wait. . . . Yes, I heard you perfectly—yes, Police Headquarters. I didn't understand. It's some mistake, of course. . . . No. . . . No, he's not here. . . . Well, then, if you knew that, what do you want? . . . I don't know where—I don't know, I tell you. . . . I can't hear you—please spell. . . . Green's? Breen's? . . . No, I never heard of such a place. . . . No, I don't know who he went with; it was some kind of a party—some kind of a . . . Who? . . . Lola? Lola what? No, no, never mind—I never heard of her—never. . . . Please—please wait a minute—I want to ask you a question—just one. Please. I've answered all of yours, haven't I? . . . Then—where is Mr. Carver? Where is he? . . . No, no, you know where he is—you do—you do—you

do! You have to tell me—You have to—you . . . Hal! Hal!"

She thrust the telephone toward him, the frantic voice slipping and stumbling in its haste.

"Make them tell you—you're a man—make them—make them——"

Her teeth were chattering so violently that the words were lost; she clung to the table edge, shaken with a dreadful and racking tremor, her tortured eyes fastened on his face.

"What the devil do you mean, calling up at this hour of the night?" demanded Devon violently. "I don't care who you are; it's a damned outrage, ringing up a woman at this hour and frightening the heart out of her. One of your dirty charges for speeding, I'll bet. . . . If you've got Mr. Carver there, send him to the 'phone and send him quick. . . . Well, if it comes down to that, I don't like your tone, either. . . . What? . . . What? . . . Oh, report and be damned; you're going to get a report on yourself that'll blow the inside of your head out. . . . Well, get me Mr. Carver then and snap into it. . . . I can't hear. . . . Where is he then? . . . Where? . . . Oh, speak louder—where is he? . . . *What?* . . ."

There was a moment of absolute silence, and then he spoke again, very quietly.

"Yes, I heard you; I heard you perfectly—be good enough not to shout. . . . Yes. . . . No, I'll explain to Mrs. Carver. . . . Well, I can't give you credentials over the telephone, but I have known Mr. and Mrs. Carver for years; I was at school with him—yes. My name's Devon. . . . D-e-v-o-n. Henry Devon. . . . Yes, I'll drop in to see you to-morrow. . . . No, you can't speak to Mrs. Carver—no, that's final. I'd be much obliged if you'd give me any details that you have. Just run over the facts. . . . Yes. . . . I didn't get that. . . . Oh—blonde. . . . No, I couldn't tell you. . . . No, you're on the wrong track; there has been no trouble of any kind between them. . . . Well, there isn't any explanation—not any; it's—it's. . . . Look here, give me your number and I'll call up again in a few minutes. . . . Yes. 5493? . . . oh, 53! . . . In about fifteen minutes. . . . Yes."

He placed the receiver slowly on the hook, and stood staring down at the little black instrument that had been so vocal, and now was dumb.

"Hal?" The voice was not more than a breath, but at its sound he shuddered, as though he were cold. "Hal?"

"Sit down, Anne; here, I'll pull it closer to the fire—that's it."

"Hal, what did that man say? Has there been an accident?"

"Something like that."

"Is Derry—hurt?"

"Yes, dear."

She sat quite still, only her fingers stirring, drawing the silken tassel on her girdle back and forth, back and forth.

"Is Derry—dead, Hal?"

"Yes, dear."

She let the girdle slip from her fingers, lifting her hands to push back the weight of hair from her forehead with a small sigh, like a tired child.

"I think it's just some mistake, don't you, Hal?"

"I wish to God that I could think so."

"Well—but what made them think it was Derry?"

"He had letters—cards—initials on his cigarette case."

"Oh, yes, it's a diamond-shaped monogram—awfully pretty. I gave it to him last Christmas; you can't think how pleased he was. D.H.C.—Derrick Horn Carver—— Who was Lola?"

"She was a—a girl who was with him."

"Was she? Where did it happen?"

"In New Jersey, somewhere this side of Princeton."

"Please tell me just what happened. Did another automobile hit them?"

"No."

After a long moment she said again in that dreadful, gentle little voice.

"Well? Then what was it? I'm waiting."

"Anne, I don't know how to tell you. I'd rather have the heart torn out of my body then tell you. Wait——"

"I'm through waiting. Is it as bad as that? Hurry up, please. What happened? Where did they find him?"

"In a road-house near Princeton—a place called Breen's."

"Was he alone?"

"No—there was a girl with him. They don't know who she was; her handkerchief had 'Lola' on it."

"Had she killed him?"

"No."

"How do they know she hadn't?"

"Because she was shot herself—in the back."

"Then who killed him?"

"They——" He set his teeth, the sweat standing out on his forehead. "I'm not going to tell you any more about it now. Wait—wait——"

"If you don't tell me, I'm going out through

that door and walk until I get to New York. Who killed him?"

"They say he killed himself."

"Killed himself? I never heard of such ridiculous nonsense." She was speaking as quietly and evenly as though she were discussing the labour problem, frozen to a calm more terrible than any madness. "Why should he have killed himself?"

"My God, how do I know? There was no one else to kill him—the pistol was still in his hand."

"Where were the rest of the party?"

"There was no one else in the party. The proprietor said that they came alone, arrived at about nine and ordered supper—it was after ten when they heard the shots."

"The proprietor probably did it himself," said Anne Carver softly. "You let them say these things about Derry without contradiction—you, who know that he would die rather than give pain to any wretched little animal that lives?"

"I can't believe it, Anne. I can't believe it—but what else in God's name can I believe?"

"You can believe what you please; and you evidently please to believe something more filthy than any nightmare that I have ever had."

"You are being extraordinarily cruel, Anne. What explanation do you give?"

"There are a thousand. Robbery——"

"But nothing that he had was touched——"

"He was protecting the girl——"

"Against whom?"

"It might have been blackmail—it might have been a maniac; it might have been anything, anything, anything but the thing that you think. If Derry were here he would strike you dead for what you believe of him. I wish that he were here to strike you dead."

"I wish it, too. Believe me, life does not very greatly appeal to me at present."

"Did you think that if you destroyed my faith in him I would fall weeping into your arms?" she asked smoothly. "Spare yourself the trouble. I would die before I touched you with a finger, now that I know what you think of him."

"By God!" He towered suddenly above her. "That's enough, I'm off. You'll live yet to regret that, Anne."

"No—no—no—don't leave me—don't, don't." She caught at his arm as though she were drowning—slipping, slipping deeper into icy water. For a moment he thought that she was going to die where she sat in the great chintz chair. "No, no; I'll be good—I'll be good. I didn't mean it, truly, truly. Hold me, hold me—you loved him, too, didn't you, Hal?"

"Yes, dear."

"If he were here he'd tell us how it happened—you'd see. He said it was an awfully good joke on him, too good to keep. He'd tell us."

"Yes, dear."

"Isn't it too bad not to believe in God and Heaven and angels and Ouija boards? Then I could pretend that I could see him again, and that he would tell me. Derry believed all that kind of thing, but I never believed in anything but Derry—and now he's gone. What time is it?"

"A minute or so to twelve, by this clock."

"He didn't keep his word, either, did he? He said not later than twelve—promised! Think of Derry breaking a promise——"

"Anne—Anne——"

"Oh, I know—of course he's dead, but still—he was Derry. The wind's worse, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"When it pounces like that, you can see the flames flatten out; it comes down the chimney. Look—it's burning lower. I'm cold—I'm cold——"

"I'll get more wood. Is it in the hall?"

"No, let it burn out. It's late; you must go, mustn't you? I don't want you to go—there's too much wind. It sounds as though it were alive—it sounds as though it were the only thing alive in the world—listen——"

She leaned far forward in the winged chair, and suddenly above the rush and clamour of the wind the telephone rang out, loudly and urgently. Again—again. She sat quite still, with lifted hand, her incredulous eyes frozen on the small black messenger blaring out its summons, the receiver fairly quivering on the hook. Again—again—strident and insistent—again. Devon rose slowly to his feet.

"I'll answer it."

"No," breathed Anne. "No."

"It's probably Headquarters again."

"No," she whispered. "No—no—it's not Headquarters again."

She stumbled out of the chair, clinging to the arms, groping, uncertain, like someone suddenly gone blind, and then in a swift rush she was past him, and the telephone was fast in her hands.

"Yes," she said clearly. "Long distance—yes, I know. . . . It's Anne, dear, it's Anne. . . . I can't hear—it's so far away—can't you speak louder? Please, please. . . . Can you hear me? Can you? . . . Listen—listen. . . . I can't hear very well—listen—you were going to tell me about the party. Remember? . . . The party—you were going to explain. . . . No—no—no—I can't hear. . . . Make me hear—make me hear—say it again!

. . . No, no, don't go—no, you can't go. . . . No! Derry! Derry!"

The terrible cry tore through the room like something unchained, and Devon sprang to her.

"Take your hands away," she panted. "Don't dare—don't dare. . . . Central!" She jangled the hook frenziedly. "Central—you cut me off. . . . Central. . . . No, no, I won't excuse it—never, never. . . . Get him back, I tell you—get him back. . . . No, I don't know the number. . . . No—you mustn't say that—you *can* help me. . . . You can. . . ." She was weeping terribly, throwing back her head to keep her lips clear of the flooding tears, stammering desperately, "No—no. . . . It was long distance, I tell you—long distance—long——"

Her voice rose—fell—was suddenly and startlingly silent. After a long moment she let the receiver slip from her fingers; it swung limply across the blue-green draperies while she stood very straight, holding the telephone against her heart.

"There's no one on the line," she said, in a small, formal, courteous voice.

Devon tried to speak, failed, tried again.

"It was a mistake?"

"Oh, no." She smiled forgivingly at him. "It

wasn't a mistake; it was Derry. He wanted to explain to me, but I couldn't hear. It was my fault, you see—I couldn't hear."

She stood quite still, stroking the small dark thing against her heart with light and gentle fingers, and then, with an infinitely caressing gesture, she bent her head to it—closer, closer, still smiling a little, as though against her curved lips she heard the echo of a far-off voice.

PHILIP THE GAY

FAIRFAX CARTER sat up very straight in the great carved walnut bed, and plaintively inspected the breakfast tray which the red-cheeked Norman maiden had just deposited beside her. Those eternal little hard rolls—the black bowl of coffee beneath whose steaming fragrance lurked the treacherous chicory—the jug of hot thin milk—the small brown jar of pale honey—she bestowed a rebellious scowl on the entire collection. She felt suddenly, frantically homesick for a bubbling percolator, for thick yellow cream and feathery biscuits, for chilled crimson berries with powdered mounds of sugar. Marie Léontine, briskly oblivious, was coaxing the very small fire in the very large chimney into dancing animation.

"*V'la!*" she announced triumphantly, with all the hearty deference that is the common gift of the French servant. "*Beau matin, p'tite dame!*"

"*Oui,*" conceded the "small lady" grudgingly. She shivered apprehensively as Marie Léontine shoved the copper water jug closer to the flames,

and trotted smiling from the room. Ugh! How in the world could any nation hope to keep clean and warm with three sticks of wood and four teaspoonfuls of water? She remembered another country—a bright and blessed country—where water rushed hot and joyous from glittering faucets into great shining tubs—where warmed and fleecy towels hung waiting to fold you hospitably close. She shivered again, forlornly, scanning the stretch of distance across the bare floor to the hook where the meagre towel hung limp and forbidding. "*La douce France!*" Ha! She pulled the tray toward her, still scowling.

Even when she scowled, Fair Carter was more distracting looking than any one young woman has a right to be. She was very small—absurdly small sitting bolt upright in the great dark bed—but she had enough charms to equip any six ladies of ordinary size and aspirations. There was the ruffled glory of her hair, warmer than gold, brighter than bronze, and her rain-coloured eyes—and the small, warm mouth, and the elfin tilt to her brows. There was that look about her, eager and reckless and adventurous, that made your heart contract, when you remembered what life did to the eager and reckless and adventurous. It had made a great many hearts contract. It had made one despairing young adorer from Richmond

say: "Fair always looks as though she were carrying a flag—and listening to drums." And it had wrung tribute from her father, who had been all her family and all her world, and who had adored her even more than the young man from Richmond. "She's the bravest of all the fighting Carters, is my Fair. And never quite so brave as when she's frightened. Panic arms her with really desperate valour!"

The bravest of the fighting Carters swallowed the dregs of the coffee bowl, pushed the tray from her, and bestowed a sudden and enchanting smile on one of the dark carved figures on the bedposts. There were four of them, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but she liked Mark the best. He had a very stern face and a little lion.

"Morning," she saluted him affably, and if St. Mark's head had not been made of walnut he would have lost it. She had kept the most potent of her charms in reserve, like a true daughter of Eve. Fair's extravagant prettiness might steel the sceptical, leading them to argue that so ornamental a head must necessarily be empty, and that no one could look that way long without becoming unbearably vain, spoiled, and capricious. But if she spoke just once—if she said any three indifferent words at random—the veriest sceptic was undone for ever. Because Fair had a Voice.

Not the coloratura kind—perhaps Patti could do more justice to *Caro Nome*—but a voice which Galli-Curci and the nightingale and the running brook and church bells and Sarah Bernhardt might well envy. She could sing a little—small, candle-lit songs about love, and absurdly stirring things that had marched down through the centuries, and haunting bits of lullabies—she had a trick of chanting them under her breath, as though it were to herself that she was singing. But when she spoke—ah, then any coloratura that ever lived might well shed tears of bitter envy. For the voice that Fair Carter used for such homely purposes as wishing lucky mortals good day and good night and God-speed was compact of magic. It was wine and velvet and moonlight and laughter and mystery—and for all its enchantment, it was as clear and honest as a nice little boy's. It did remarkable things to the English language. Fair would have widened her eyes in cool disdain at the idea of indulging in such far-advertised Southern tricks as "you all" and "Ah raickon" and "honey lamb," but she managed to linger over vowels and elude consonants in a way that did not even remotely suggest the frozen North. It reduced English to such a satisfactory state of submission that she only experimented half heartedly with any other language. A Chinaman would

have understood her when she said "Please"—a Polynesian would have thrilled responsive to her "Thank you."

Therefore she had gone serenely on her way during those two terrible and thrilling years in France, those three terrible and bitter years in Germany, ignoring entirely the fact that the Teutons had a language of their own, and acquiring just enough of the Gallic tongue to enable her to indulge in the gay and hybrid banter of her beloved doughboys —a swift patter consisting largely of "*Ah oui*," "*ça ne fait rien*" and "*pas compris!*" It had served her purpose admirably for a good five years, but it had proved a broken reed during the past five weeks. The De Lautrees were capable of speaking almost any kind of French—Monsieur le Vicomte leaned toward a nice mixture of Bossuet and Anatole France, Madame his ancient and regal mother to Marivaux with sprightly touches of Voltaire, Laure and Diane, to René Bazin when they were being supervised and Gyp when they weren't—Philippe le Gai to a racy and thrilling idiom, at once virile and graceful, as old as the Chanson de Roland, as new as Sacha Guitry's latest comedy. But after several courteous and tense attempts to exchange amenities with Laure's "Little American" they had abandoned the tongue of their fathers and devoted their earnest attention

to mastering the English language. It was easy enough for Philippe and Laure, of course; they already knew a great deal more about English literature than Fair had dreamed existed, though they tripped over the spoken word, but the other members of the family laboured sternly and industriously, while their small guest surveyed their efforts with indulgent amusement. It seemed quite natural and reasonable to Fairfax Carter they they should continue to do so indefinitely—they wanted to talk to her, didn't they? Well, then! They were getting on quite well, too, she reflected benevolently, still smiling at St. Mark, who stared back at her so unresponsively that she suddenly ceased to smile.

"I suppose you don't understand English, either?" she demanded severely. "'Bout time a little old thing like you started to learn it, I should think!"

Her eye wandered to the travelling clock ticking competently away on the desk, and rested there for an electrified second.

"Mercy!" she murmured, appalled, and was out of the bed and across the room with all the swift grace of a kitten. Half-past nine, and the De Chartreuil boys were to ride over for a game of "croquo-golf" at ten! Her toes curled rebelliously at the contact of the cold flags, but she

ignored them stoically, pouncing on the copper jug and whirling across the room like a small, bright tempest. What a divine day, chanted her heart, suddenly exultant, as she splashed the water recklessly and tumbled into her clothes. It was wonderful to feel almost well again—to feel weariness slipping from her like a worn-out garment. The sun came flooding in through the deep windows, gilding the faded hangings—gilding the vivid head—she could hear horses' hoofs beneath her window, and she flung it wide, leaning far out.

"*Bonjour, Monsieur Raoul—bonjour, Monsieur André!* Oh, Laure, are you down already?"

"Already? This hour, small lazy one! Quick now, or we leave thee!"

"No, no," wailed Fair. "I'll be there—I'm almost there now, truly. Save the red mallet for me, angel darling—it's the only one I can hit with. Don't let her go, Monsieur André!"

"Never and never, Mademoiselle. We are your slaves."

She knotted her shoe-laces with frantic fingers, snatched up the brown tam from the table, and raced down the corridor between the swaying tapestries like a small wild thing. But half way down she halted abruptly. Behind one of the great doors someone was singing, gay and ringing

and reckless, a gallant thing, that set her heart flying.

"Monsieur Charette à dit a ces Messieurs
Monsieur Charette à dit——"

Philippe le Gai was singing the old Vendée marching song that he had translated for her the day before.

For a moment she wavered and then, thrusting her hands deep in her pockets, she took a long breath. "Morning, Monsieur Philippe!" she challenged clearly.

The song broke off, and Fair could see him, for all the closed doors—could see his shining black head and the dark young face with its recklessly friendly smile, and its curiously unfriendly eyes, gray and quiet. She could see—— The blithe voice rang out again.

"And a most good morning to Mistress Fairy Carter! Where is she going, with those quick feet?"

"She's going to play croquo-golf with Laure and Diane and the De Chartreuils. It's such a heavenly beautiful day. You—you aren't coming?"

"But never of this life!" laughed the voice. "How old you think we in here are, hein? Seven? Eight? We have twenty-nine years and thirty-nine gray hairs—we don't play with foolish chil-

dren. Only fairies can do that! You be careful of the ball going by old Daudin's farm, see; there's a sacred traitor of a ditch just over the hill—hit him hard and good, that ball, and maybe you clear it. Maybe you don't, too! It is one animal of a ditch!" The light, strong laughter swept through the door, and Fair swayed to it as though it were a hand that pulled her. Then she turned away with a brave lift to her head.

"Thanks a lot—I'll be careful. See you this afternoon, then."

But the light feet finished their journey down the gray corridor and the worn flight of stone steps in an ominously sedate fashion. No, it was no use; it was no use at all. She felt suddenly discouraged and baffled, she who a few minutes before had been a candle, brave and warm and shining—only to have a careless breath blow out the light, leaving nothing but a cold little white stick with a dead black wick for a heart. It was horribly unfair, and someone should most certainly pay for it; someone who was sitting blithe and callous and safe behind those heavy doors—heavy doors of oak, and heavier ones of cool indifference. She drew a quivering breath, and straightened, as though she had heard far off a bugle sing. Oh, how dared he, how dared he be indifferent? He, who idled all his life away, paying no tribute to the

world save laughter, a useless, black-haired, arrogant young good-for-nothing? How dared he be indifferent to beauty and riches and grace and wit and kindness, when they lingered at his side, tremulous and expectant? It was worse than cruel to be indifferent to the personification of all these attributes—it was crass, intolerable stupidity. She made a sudden violent gesture, pushing something far from her. That dream was ended; she was through. She would tell them to-night that her visit was over—that to-morrow she must be on her way to Paris—and America.

But at the thought of America her feet faltered to a halt, as though she were reluctant to go one step nearer to that enchanted country, empty now and strange, since Dad had gone. How could she go back to that great house with its white pillars and echoing halls?—how could she face its cold and silent beauty without his arms about her? No, no, she couldn't—she was afraid—she was afraid of loneliness. While she had had her work, while she had had those thousands of brown young faces lifted to her in comradeship and worship and mirth, she had fought off the nightmare of his going. No one had known but Laure—Laure who had loved "the little American" from the first day that she had come laughing and tiptoeing down the long room with contraband chocolates for

Laure's bitter, dying poilus—Laure who had held her in her tired young arms all the terrible night after the cable came—Laure who had wept when a tearless and frozen Fair had set off for Germany with her division—Laure who had come all the way to Coblenz to bring her back to Normandy when she had literally dropped in her tracks two years later. Dear Laure, who had healed and tended this small alien, she would be loath to leave her go.

Fair's lip quivered; she felt suddenly too small and solitary to face a world that could play such hideous tricks. It was bad enough and thrice incredible to have rendered Laure's brother impervious to her every enchantment, but it was sheer wanton cruelty to have made him utterly unworthy of any lady's straying fancy—and alas, alas, how fancy strayed! The bravest of all the fighting Carters was badly frightened; the whole thing savoured of black magic. She, who had flouted and flaunted every masculine heart that had been laid at her feet since she had put on slippers, to have fallen, victim to a laugh and a careless word! Why, she barely knew him, he held so lightly aloof, courteous and smiling and indifferent; it was hatefully obvious that he preferred his own society to any that they could offer. He wouldn't play—he wouldn't work—he wouldn't even eat with them. Of course he had been in the hospital for

ages, but he had been out of it for ages, too, and it was criminal folly to continue to pamper any one as he was pampered. A man—a real *man*—would die of shame before he would permit his sisters to give music lessons while he locked himself in his room and laughed. Never was he with them, save for the brief hour after *déjeuner* when they drank their cups of black coffee under the golden beech trees—and for that heavenly space after dinner in the great salon, full of firelight and candlelight and falling rose-leaves and music, with Madame de Lautrec stitching bright flowers into her tapestry frame and Monsieur le Vicomte smiling his courteous and tragic smile into the leaping fire in the carved chimney, and the fresh young voices rising and falling about the piano over which Laure bent her golden head—Diane's silver music lifting clearly, Laure's soft contralto murmuring like far waters, and Philippe singing as his troubadour ancestor might have sung, fearless and true and shining—Fair caught her breath at the memory of that ringing splendour, and then looked stern. It was ridiculous to worship any one as the De Lautrecs worshipped their tall Philippe and it was obviously highly demoralizing for him—highly. Laure was the worst; it was as though she couldn't bear to have him out of her sight for a minute; if he rose to go—oh, if he even

stirred, she was at his side in a flash, her hand slipped into his, all her white tranquillity shaken into some mysterious terror at the thought that he might escape her again.

"No, no!" she would cry passionately when Fair rallied her with flying laughter. "You do not know what you say, my Fair. I have no courage left; none, none, I tell you. He is my life—and for four years every morning, every night I made myself say: 'You will not see him again, you will not hear him again, you will not touch him again. But you will be brave, you hear? You will be brave because it is for France.' Now France has no more need of my courage—and that is very well, because I have no more to give her. It is all gone. I will never be brave again."

She was the only one that Philippe would suffer to come near him in all the long hours that he spent behind those dark barred doors; often, as Fair sped by on light feet, she could hear the murmur of their voices, low and absorbed—shutting her out, thought Fair forlornly, more than any lock on any door. What did they find to talk about, hour after hour, blind and deaf to the world that lay about them, golden under the October sun? What spell did Laure use to bind him, what magic to dispel all the endless witchery that Fair had spread before him, first carelessly,

then startled into wide-eyed consciousness and finally, during these last flying days, driven to despairing prodigality? She bit her lip, blinking back the treacherous tears fiercely. Some day—some day he should pay for this indifference, and pay with interest. The loitering feet paused again while their owner visualized, through the mist of unwelcome tears, a contrite Philippe dragging himself to grovel abjectly at her feet, begging for one small word of mercy and of hope. The vivid countenance suddenly assumed an expression of exquisite contentment.

"No, Philippe," she would tell him, lightly but inflexibly, "no, my poor boy, it would be sheer cruelty to mislead you. Never, under any circumstances could I——"

"*Enfin!*" rang out a richly indignant voice. "Do you walk in your sleep, my good goose? We wait and we wait until we are one half frozen, and you arrive like the snail he was your little brother and——"

"Oh, Laure, I *am* sorry! Box my ears—no, hard—you tell her to box them hard, Monsieur André!"

"I, Mademoiselle? But never—I think we are well repaid for our vigil, hey, Raoul? Here is that very red mallet with which you will beat us all. We take Bravo with us, Diane?"

Diane shook her curly head dubiously at the frantic police dog.

"Who holds the leash; you, André? Last time he get loose, he bite three sheep—three, before we catch him. You hear, monster?"

Fair and Bravo exchanged guilty glances.

"Well, but Diane, he pulled so; truly he did. He went so fast, right over those hedges, and the leash cut through my mittens, and——"

Laure and Diane yielded to outrageous laughter.

"Raoul, you should see them! Right over those sticking hedges they go, Bravo ahead, big like three wolves, and Fair 'way behind at the other end of the leash, so small like the little Red Riding Hood, and so fast like she was flying! Oh, *bon Dieu!* I thought we die laughing!"

"Very, very funny," commented Fair bitterly. "Specially for me. How are we going to-day?"

"How if we go across the little meadow to the Gates and home by the Cœur d'Or? Too far, Raoul?"

"We will be back for lunch? *À la bonheur*—we go. Ah, well hit, Mademoiselle. Straight like arrows, too!"

Fair raced after the red ball, her scarf flying behind her like a banner, wings at her heels, stars in her eyes, tragedy forgotten.

Three more strokes like that would get her to

the meadow—oh, wonderful to be alive, to be swift and light and sure, to feel the wind lifting your hair, and the sun warming your heart in a world that was once more safe and kind. Dear world—dear France, dear France, so kind to this small American—she absolved it lavishly from its sins of cold water and bitter coffee; where else in all the world could you find a game of the inspiring simplicity of croquo-golf—a game whose sole equipment was a ball and a mallet—whose sole object was to cover as much space in as few strokes as possible? Where else could you find such comrades to play it with, grave and eager as children, ardent-eyed and laughing-lipped? She smote the ball again, her voice flying with it.

"Oh, Laure, as I live and breathe, it's cleared the ditch!

> 'Monsieur Charette hath said to all his peers,
> Monsieur Charette hath said to all his peers,
> Come, good sirs!
> Now let us sally forth and whip these curs!'"

The exultant chant wavered for a moment as the proud possessor of the ball cleared the ditch, too, and took up her triumphant lilt, crescendo:

> "'Take up thy gun, my good Gregory!
> Take up thy virgin of ivory—
> Fill up thy drinking gourd right cheerily—
> Our comrades have gone down
> To fight for Paris Town!'"

André de Chartreuil swung up beside her, breathless and laughing. Luck was with him; all the English that he had mastered as liaison officer raced to the tip of his tongue.

"But what a child! How old are you, Mlle. Fairfax Carter?"

"Too old," mourned Fairfax, shaking her bright head till the curls danced in the sun. "Much, much too old—old enough to know better." She pounced on the half-buried ball with a small shriek of excitement. "Ah ha, my little treasure, a mere turn of the wrist and—bet I make the gate in four strokes."

"Bet you do not," replied André obligingly.

"Done; all the mushrooms that you find in Daudin's meadow to—to what?"

"To the very great privilege of kissing the tips of your fingers." Young De Chartreuil's voice was carefully light.

"Monsieur André!" Fair, her mallet poised for the blow, paused long enough to bestow a distracting glance through her lashes, oddly at variance with her maternal tone. "You aren't going to begin that kind of thing, are you?" Her laughter rang out, gay and lovely and mocking.

Young De Chartreuil smiled back at her—a not very convincing smile. She was the most enchanting creature that he had ever met, but

her lack of discretion froze the marrow in his bones.

"Mademoiselle, one so charming is privileged to forget that one may also be kind," he remarked formally.

Fair stopped laughing. "Oh, nonsense!" she returned abruptly, forgetting that one may also be polite. She hit viciously at the ball, scowling after it more like a cross little boy than a lady of Romance. "There—see what you made me do!" The astonished André met her accusing gaze blankly.

"I, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, sir, you." The tone was unrelenting. "I'm a great deal kinder than I have any business being," she added darkly. "I certainly am. Sooner or later every single one of you turn on me like—like—vipers, and tell me that it's not possible that I could have been so everlastingly kind and patient and wonderful if I hadn't meant something by it. Goodness knows what you'd all like me to do," she murmured gloomily. "Make faces and bark like a dog every time one of you comes near me, I s'pose. Where's that ball? I wish I were dead."

This time André's smile was clearly unforced.

"Oh, no one in the world is droll like you!" he stated with conviction. "But no one. No, do

not bark like a little dog—I will be good, I swear." He shrugged his shoulders philosophically. "After all, if God had made you tender hearted you would spend your days weeping for the ones you broke. So this way it is best, is it not so?"

Fair beamed on him graciously. "Well, of course!" she assented with conviction. "And I'm certainly thankful that you see it. If you'd had about seventy-eight thousand soldiers spending their every waking minute telling you that they'd fade away and die if you weren't kind to them, you'd see that the novelty of it would wear off a little. Wear off a good deal." She gave the ball a rather perfunctory hit. After all, Fairfax Carter on the subject of Fairfax Carter was more absorbing than any game ever invented. She drew a deep breath and started off headlong on her favourite topic. "It's perfectly horrible being a girl—and it's a million times worse if you're a—well, if you aren't exactly revolting looking and are what the dime novels call an heiress."

"It must, indeed, be hard," agreed young De Chartreuil consolingly.

Fair glanced at him suspiciously from the corner of her eye.

"You needn't laugh, my dear boy—it most certainly is. I don't believe men care one little snip for your soul or—or your intellect."

"Oh, but surely!" protested De Chartreuil politely.

"No, sir," maintained the complete cynic, giving another abstracted hit at the ball. "Not a single, solitary one. Oh, bother—look where it went then! How many strokes have you had? Four? *Four?* I've had five, and look at the horrible thing now. What was I talking about? Oh, proposals! I don't believe in international marriages, do you, Monsieur André?"

Monsieur André made a light and deprecating gesture. "I, Mademoiselle? But I have had so few!"

"I do think foreigners are horribly frivolous!" murmured Fair to the universe at large. "I've not had so many myself, but I can still think they're a bad idea. You couldn't possibly help thinking that they were pretty cold and calculating."

"Could you not?" inquired one who had come very near being a co'd calculator in a freezing voice. "I, for one, try to look more charitably on the pretty ladies who covet our poor coronets."

Fair brushed this thrust aside with the obliviousness that made her strength and her weakness once the engine of her attention was racing along her one-track mind to the goal of her selection. Humour, satire, impertinence, or indignation were

signals powerless to impede her progress when she was on her way; she rushed by them heedlessly, recklessly indifferent to anything short of a head-on collision.

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of the girls—who in the world wants a little old coronet! Of course they're nice if you're *used* to them," she added hastily. "But it was the men that I was thinking of; you simply couldn't be sure, not ever. You work, don't you?"

"Alas, yes, Mademoiselle!" De Chartreuil abandoned resentment and stood leaning on his mallet, laughing down at this incorrigible and enchanting small barbarian.

"Monsieur André, why do you suppose that Monsieur de Lautrec doesn't work?"

"Philippe?" His voice was strange.

"Yes, Philippe—you didn't suppose that I meant the Vicomte, did you? This place keeps him busy from morning to night. Philippe, of course." Her voice was impatient, but there was a desperate eagerness behind it that checked the quick words on De Chartreuil's tongue.

"Mademoiselle, for four years he worked day and night; he gave the blood of his heart, the blood of his soul in work—would you grudge him a little rest?"

"But, good heavens, he's had years to rest,"

cried Fair despairingly. "He's not going to rest until he dies, is he? You're not resting—Monsieur Raoul's not resting—no one in the world has a right to rest when there's so much to do—no one!"

"For long, long after the war he did not leave the hospital, Mademoiselle."

"Well, wasn't he resting there?" demanded his inquisitor fiercely.

"No," replied the boy gravely. "No, he was not resting there, I think."

"What—what was the matter with him in the hospital?" asked Fair, making her lips into a very straight line so that they wouldn't quiver.

"It was—what you call shell-shock."

"Shell-shock? That's horrible—oh, don't I know! Those hospitals—like a nightmare—worse than a nightmare——" She swept it far from her with a resolute gesture. "It's no good thinking about it; you have to forget! And Heaven knows that he's over it now; Heaven knows that now he isn't suffering from any breakdown. I've never seen him look even serious for two minutes at a time—I don't believe that he has the faintest idea of what seriousness means. It's all very well to have a sense of humour; I have a perfectly wonderful sense of humour myself when I'm not thinking of something more important—but it's ridiculous to think that that's all there is to it!" She

hit the ball a reckless blow that sent it flying far across the tawny meadow, and turned to young De Chartreuil a lovely little countenance on fire with righteous indignation and angry distress. "A real man would know that life ought to be more than just laughing half the day—and singing half the night—and looking the way the heroes in the moving pictures ought to look—and chatter-boxing away in his room for hours and hours and hours!" Bitter resentment at this unpalatable memory sent the colour flying higher in her cheeks, and she swung off after the red ball at a furious scamper. "And by Glory, I'm going to tell him so!" she announced tempestuously over her shoulder to the astounded Andrê. He sprang forward, galvanized into instant action.

"Mademoiselle—Mademoiselle, wait, I beg you. You jest, of course, but——"

"Indeed I do not jest, of course," retorted Fair hotly. "I don't jest one little bit. Why in the world shouldn't I tell him?"

"There are, I should think, one thousand reasons why," he replied sharply. "Must I give you the thousand and first, and assure you that always, always, all the days that you live, it would be to you a very deep regret?"

"It certainly would not," replied his unimpressed audience flatly. Any one who attempted

to frighten Fair out of any undertaking whatever was making a vital strategic error, but André de Chartreuil was too young and too thoroughly outraged to indulge in strategy.

"Mademoiselle, but this is madness——"

"Monsieur, but this is impertinence." Fair's chin was tilted at an angle that implied that battle, murder, and sudden death would be child's play to her from then on. This—this little *whipper-snapper* of a French infant who had basely pretended to be at her feet, suddenly rising up and dictating a course of conduct to her—to *her!* Well, it simply proved what she had always maintained. You couldn't trust a foreigner—you couldn't, not ever.

"For what you call impertinence, forgive me." The tone was far from repentant, and Fair waited stiffly for further developments. "My poor English renders me clumsy—grant me, I pray, patience."

Very poor English, thought Fair sternly; it might mean anything. Grant him patience indeed! She had precious little patience to spare for any one this morning, as he would discover to his cost.

"Philippe, he is like no one else!" Young De Chartreuil made a gesture of impotent despair, his careful English suddenly turned traitor. "You do not see it, but he is like no one else, I tell you.

I who was his sous-officier—his how you call it, his under-officer—ah, no matter—he was my captain for three years, and I know, you hear me, I know."

"Heaven knows I hear you," Fair assured him with ominous calm. "I should think that they could hear you in Paris!"

"Well, then, I tell you that we, his men, we who followed him, we would have given the blood out of our hearts for him to shine his boots with—we knew him, we. You know why they call him Philippe le Gai?"

"I know that there's some story about an old troubadour called Philippe le Gai——"

"About a very great soldier who was also a very great singer, Mademoiselle, long years ago in Provence. Philippe is of his race; one of those who meet Death itself with a song. That other Philippe died eight hundred years ago, and they say that he died singing. And we—we who followed this Philippe and gave to him our souls—we know that he could face worse than death—and still sing."

"There isn't the slightest necessity of making a curtain speech to me about courage," replied the last of the fighting Carters, and the velvet voice rang as cold and hard as drawn steel. "I know quite a good deal about it, thank you. I may not

have had any old ancestor that went rampaging around singing songs about how gay and brave and wonderful he was, but I had three great-uncles and a grandfather who were killed in the Civil War and a brother who was killed in the Spanish War, and—and a father——" Her voice failed her, but she swallowed hard and pushed on relentlessly: "And a father who died for his country just as much as any of them, because he went right on working for it when he *knew* that it would kill him—and who didn't even let me know that he was dying, because I couldn't help him, and he thought that I might help America, and I was the only one of the Carters left to fight for America. And I kept on fighting, even though it just about killed me, too; I went into Germany with my men, because I knew that he wouldn't think the war was over until we got what we fought for—until we *really* got it—and I'd be there yet if it hadn't been for those idiotic doctors. Nervous breakdown! For gracious sakes, I'd like to hear what they'd say if one of their old colonels started to have a nervous breakdown. This isn't any kind of a world to sit and twirl your thumbs and pet your nerves in—and I can't see that singing about it makes it much nobler—or laughing, either."

"There are many things, perhaps, that you cannot see," commented young De Chartreuil, and

at the tone in his voice there was one thing that Fair did see, and that was red.

"Well, I can see this," she cried in a voice shaken with sheer fury, "I can see that it's possible to be just as much of a slacker after the war as during it."

"Mademoiselle!"

"In America men *work*," stormed Fair. "They——"

"In America you save your generosity for your own faults, it seems." He raised a commanding hand, and Fair stood voiceless, literally transfixed with rage. "No, wait, I beg you; I have not yet finished. Perhaps in your great country you forget that work is the means—that it is not the end; no, no, believe me, it is not the end. It is also not very wise to condemn utterly that which may differ only in kind, not in degree. To you courage may be a dark and stern thing—a duty—but to some—to one at least, Mademoiselle—it is a shining and gay and splendid gift; it is a joy."

"Are you through with your lessons for the day?" asked Fair icily. "Because if you are, I'm going!" She whirled the red mallet about her head like a battle-axe, and sent it spinning far from her after the neglected ball. "Good-bye—I'm off. Tell the others I twisted my ankle—got a headache—tell them any old lie you think of——"

"But, Mademoiselle, you cannot——"

Fairfax Carter halted for a moment in her tumultuous progress, the wind whipping her leaf-brown skirts about her and sending the bright curls flying about the reckless, stubborn little face.

"Can't I?" she called back defiantly. "Can't I? Well, wait and see! I'm going to tell your precious Philippe de Lautrec just exactly what I think of a hero who spends his life resting on his laurels while his sisters work their fingers to the bone—and you and Foch and the Archangel Gabriel can't stop me, so I'd advise you to stick to croquo-golf. Good-bye!"

She was gone in a brilliant whirl of flying skirts and scarf and hair. Young De Chartreuil watched her disappearing down the long hill that led past Daudin's farm to the far gate of the château with an expression in which dismay was tempered by a grim satisfaction. After a moment he shrugged his shoulders briefly, retrieved the scarlet ball and mallet, and set off slowly toward the sounds of distant laughter that marked the other players. Well, let her go; she was richly in need of a lesson, that lovely little demon! And to think that for a moment he had dreamed—ah, name of Heaven, what an escape!——

Fair, in the meantime, raced lightly on her chosen way. She was in a towering rage at De

Chartreuil for his presumptuous insolence, and in an even more towering rage at herself for the effect that it had had on her. Even immature reflection revealed the unmistakable fact that she had behaved a good deal more like a fish-wife than the traditional great lady. About the only things that she had failed to do were boxing his ears and screaming at the top of her lungs. And she had felt terribly—oh, but terribly—like doing both of them. No, it was all very well to have a temper, but it was a bad strategic error to lose it. Possession is nine points of the law, especially with tempers. Fortunately, the hateful De Chartreuil child had been even worse than she. He had looked at one time as though it would have been pure ecstasy to throttle the life out of her—the time that she had got in that neat thrust about peace-time slackers. Well, she was on her way to tell one of them exactly what she thought of him as fast as her stubby brown boots would carry her. She wrenched impatiently at the iron latch on the great north gate—it yielded with an unexpectedness that nearly threw her off her feet, and she heard it clang to behind her as she raced up the long alley of lime trees that led to the stone terrace. If she were lucky, she might find the object of her righteous wrath basking there in the sunlight, without so much as a book in his graceless hands,

dreaming away the hours, his dark face turned to the golden fields of his inheritance. She had found him there before—and, yes, fate was with her—there he was now in his great chair with his back to the lime trees, lounging deep. For a moment she hesitated, her heart thundering in her ears, and then she swung recklessly across the sun-warmed flags, hands deep in her pockets, her chin tilted at an outrageous angle.

"Oh, there you are!" she hailed in her magic voice, but there was something behind the words that turned them from a salutation to a challenge.

Philippe le Gai sat quite still for a moment, and then, without rising, he flung her a radiant smile over his shoulder.

"And there are you!" he said. "All finished, the croquo-golf?"

"No—just finished for me. It's a stupid game, don't you think?"

"Me? I think no game stupid that once I have started—no, not one. Then I must play it through to the end, or count myself defeated!"

Fair's eyes darkened ominously.

"But you don't start many games, do you?" she asked.

"No," acquiesced the young man in the chair. "As you say, not many."

Fair set her teeth. Did he think that if he continued to sprawl all his splendid length there, unmoving, that she would pass on? Was this his method of once more conveying to her the information that her presence was an intrusion? Oh, for a man—for some slim, freckled, young American—to take this insolent foreigner by his coat collar and jerk him to his unworthy feet! Perhaps it might be better to have two of them—he was disgustingly tall. She swung round the corner of the chair, flames dancing in her eyes.

"Are you—very busy?" she inquired in a dangerously polite little voice.

Philippe le Gai showed all of his white teeth in another flashing smile.

"But no!" he replied accurately, and made a swift motion as though to rise, only to check himself more swiftly. "Be seated, I pray you!"

The look of consuming rage that Fair flashed on him as she seated herself in the small iron chair opposite him would have shrivelled a normally sensitive soul to gray ashes. Her impervious host, however, merely leaned deeper into his bright cushions, the smile still edging his lips.

"Laure still plays?"

"Yes," replied Fair. She spoke with considerable difficulty; the royal condescension of that "Be seated" had left her feeling slightly dizzy.

"I have here a paper which will need her sharp wits—she will not be long, perhaps?"

"I don't know," replied Fair sombrely. Just how, she wondered, did you lead up to telling a comparative stranger that you despised him? It was harder than she had thought it would be, out there in the meadow—it was the proud turn of the black head, and the sure strength of the long brown hands, and the sheer beauty of the flashing smile that made it hard. No one had a right to look like that—and to be despicable. It wasn't fair.

"I think that those poor Gods in Heaven must envy us our earth to-day!" said the object of her scorn, turning his face to the deep blue of the autumn sky. "So warm, so cold, so sweet—like some mad Bacchante, bare of throat and arm for all her warm fur skins, with grapes of purple weighing down her curls, and wine of gold tripping up her light heels . . . Once, you know, when I was the smallest of little boys, Monsieur my grandfather call me to come down from my sleep to drink the health of my very new sister—of young Laure. There was a great banquet, a table brave with fruit and flowers and lace and candles, and they put me onto that table, and give me a little burning golden brandy to drink in a great cool glass of crystal—and straight to my head it flew—ah, Dieu, the lucky, curly head! I remember still, you

see—I remember how the world must feel to-day. The world and I, we have been fortunate."

Fair's mouth was a rose-red line of stern distaste. It might be all very French to take a perfectly good autumn day and turn it into an intoxicated heathen, but in her opinion, which was far from humble, it was simply outrageous. And those detestable people, giving brandy to that darling little boy—well, all little boys were more or less darling. It was their truly lamentable degeneration at about the age of twenty-nine that was occupying her at present. She leaned forward swiftly, her hands very cold and her eyes very hot.

"Monsieur Philippe, don't you ever, ever get tired of just sitting around doing *nothing?*"

Perhaps the passion in the clear voice touched him—for a moment Philippe le Gai belied his name. Then he made a slight gesture with the hand that held the papers, a gesture of dismissal to such folly as sober thought.

"Tired, Mistress Fairy? How should I be tired, doing nothing? And how are you so sure that I do nothing while I sit around—how are you so sure of that, I wonder?"

"Because I can see you," replied Fair with despairing emphasis.

"Can you then, Wise Eyes? Can you see so

well? Then you must see that it is not nothing that I do."

"Oh, isn't it?" she whispered breathlessly, her heart in her voice. "Isn't it?"

"But never! While I sit around, I am being very, very busy, me, being alive—and being amused—and being, believe me, most eternally and most exultantly grateful. You call that doing nothing?"

"Of course I call that doing nothing," replied Fair fiercely.

"Now that is strange—because, you know, I am so busy doing it that I can find time to do nothing else. To sit with the sun and beauty and silence all about, that is better than heaven, I think. Always I have loved Beauty better than life and once I thought that I had lost her for ever—and, see, she is mine again! In other fields—fields churned to madness, horrors of white clay and red blood, with the proud trees stripped to dirty black stumps—in other fields I remembered these, and I swore to that god of battles that if he would send me back to this golden grace—to this greenness and kind quiet—I would ask nothing more. And where those stenches made the poor soul sicker than the body, I could sometimes hold my breath, and smell apple-blossoms in the spring moonlight, and yellow roses in the summer sunlight, and

spiced wood burning in the great chimneys, and cider blowing across the autumn winds. Now—now I need not hold the breath to smell the good ripe fruit, now I need not close my eyes to see my fields of gold, with the little warm gray sheep against the hills. Now I have come home to my fields, and I keep faith with the god of battles—I ask for nothing more. Look before you, Wise Eyes; what do you see?"

"The alley of lime trees and the north gate and the meadow," said Fair, fighting to harden the voice that wanted only to break.

"Look farther——"

"I can see the thatch on Daudin's roof and the road to the village and the little steeple on the church."

"Nothing more?"

"There's nothing more to see."

"You do not see a little boy climbing that iron gate and racing home up that long alley, singing—racing quick, quick because it begins to grow dark?"

"Of course I don't see him," replied Fair defiantly, but she leaned forward, straining her eyes.

"Look farther—look far away; you cannot see the other little boys, many, many, all hurrying while they sing to get home before it is dark? No? Ah, poor Wise Eyes! Perhaps it is because it is years

that those little boys hurry down, instead of just an alley of lime trees—they are hurrying home clean across the centuries. Since that first Philippe came singing up from the south, they have loved these gray stones best of all the earth—best, I think, of heaven. And that last little boy, he did not love it least, believe me. Perhaps he is singing louder than them all, because though they have made it, those others, he has saved it."

"He didn't save it any more than a good many million other people," commented Fair ruthlessly.

Philippe le Gai threw back his black head with a ringing peal of laughter. "Truly as you say, not more. But that is another reason why he sings, believe me."

"But what did you do before you started in to save it?" pursued the remorseless inquisitor, and suddenly she sickened at her task. The radiance flagged in the dark face before her; for a moment Philippe le Gai looked mortally tired.

"Me? I was an artist—and an engineer." He sat staring ahead of him, tense and straight; and then he relaxed easily, the smile playing again. "Not so good an artist, and not so bad an engineer. I was oh, most young, and oh, most vain, and gray-headed old gentlemen from far away came to beg a little advice as to what to do with their sick mines."

"Mines?" Fair's face was alight. "That was what Dad used to do before he went in for cotton. It was copper, you know. D'you know about copper?"

"Every kind of mine that ever was I knew about," he assured her lightly. "But now I have forgotten."

"How could you?" she cried. "How could you, when they need you so? Don't you think that that little boy would be ashamed if he could see you sitting on this terrace—just sitting and sitting like a great enormous lazy black cat? Don't you?"

"Why, no," replied Philippe le Gai. "No, I do not think that he would be ashamed."

Fair wrung her hands together; she felt defeat closing about her.

"Those fields that you talked about—don't you want to make them green and golden again, too?"

"They are very tired, those fields," said the man. "Shall we not let them rest?"

"Oh!" cried Fair, and the valiant voice struggled and broke. "Oh, how can you—oh, oh, how can you?"

"Fair——"

He was on his feet at last—the swift move sent the paper flying, and it came fluttering

irresponsibly across the sunlit space between them, dancing to a halt almost at her feet. It had blown open, and her incredulous eyes were riveted on the letterhead—the little thick black letters spelling out the name of Dad's attorney, Henry C. Forrester, Wall Street—she stared down blankly:

Dear Sir—
In further reply to your request for full details as to the fortune left Miss Carter by her father——

A wave of scarlet swept over her from heel to brow; she felt as though she were drowning, she felt as though she were being buried alive, she felt as though a bolt of lightning had passed clean through her body, leaving her quite dead and still.

"So that's what you are?" she said. "You—you! I might have known."

"What I am?" His voice was touched with a little wonder. "No, but I do not understand; what is it that I am?"

"There's no word for you," she told him between her clicking teeth. She was shaking violently, uncontrollably, like someone in a chill. "Crawling to my lawyers—you—you—a common adventurer——"

"You are mad," he said.

"It's here," cried Fair. "Look. It's here in black and white—are you going to deny it?"

"Give me that letter," said Philippe le Gai.

"I wouldn't touch it in a thousand years," she flung at him. "Not in a hundred hundred thousand. It's filthy—it can lie there till it rots."

"Pick it up," he told her.

"How dare you?" she whispered. "How dare you?"

"It is not so very greatly daring," he assured her. "Pick it up, I tell you."

Fair stared at him voicelessly where he stood, tall and splendid and terrible in the sunlight. No, no, this was nightmare—this was not real. It was not she who bent to the bidding of this relentless monster—it was some other Fairfax caught in a hideous dream. The paper rattled in her fingers like goblin castanets.

"Now bring it to me."

She crossed the little space of sun-warmed bricks, her eyes fixed and brilliant as a sleep-walker.

"Closer," bade the still voice. "Closer yet. Yes. Now put it in my hand. That way—yes. It was not yours, you see; did you forget that?"

Fair made no answer. She stood frozen, watching the brown fingers folding the bit of white paper into a neat oblong.

"I would not, I think, say any word to Laure of this," said the voice. "And I would not, I

think, stay here longer. I would forget all this, and go."

"I am going this afternoon," she told him through her stiff lips. "And I am going to tell Laure—everything."

"Do not," he said. "Do not, believe me." He stood staring down at the paper, and then he spoke again.

"I am, as you say, an adventurer," said Philippe le Gai, in that terrible and gentle voice. "And adventure is, as you say, common. For which I thank my gods. You have nothing more to say to me?"

"Nothing."

"Then that is all, I think, Miss Carter."

Obviously, the audience was over, the courtier was dismissed. Oh, for one word—one little, little word—to blast him where he stood, gentle and insolent and relentless. She could not find that word, and she would die before she would give him any other. The brown boots stumbled in their haste on the terrace steps; at the foot she turned once more to face him, flinging him a last look of terror and defiance and despair—and deeper than all, wonder. But Philippe le Gai's face was turned once more to his golden fields.

Far away, at the end of the long alley, she could see the players coming back; she could hear them.

too, laughing and calling to each other—Bravo was barking frenziedly, heedless of Diane's small, peremptory shouts—there, he was off, with Raoul and Diane in pursuit, headed straight for the distant stables. She clung to the stone railing for a moment, limp and sick, and then she flung back her head, spurred her flagging feet, and set off down the arching lime trees, running. Running because she was desperately tired and desperately frightened; because it was toward battle that she ran, and she must get there swiftly. Laure hailed from the far end.

"Ah, small deserter, you come to surrender? Come quick, then, and do penance."

"I've not come to do penance," said the deserter. She stood very straight with her hands clasped tightly behind her. "I've come to say good-bye."

"Good-bye?" echoed Laure. "Here, André, take this mallet, this ball. What folly is this, Fair?"

"It's not folly; the folly's been in staying. I've learned quite a lot of things in the last few minutes, Laure. Monsieur de Lautrec has some papers that he wants to show you."

"Papers? Well, but what is all this mystery? Come, now, Fair, you are not well, I know. The doctor he said you should not be excited."

"I am not in the least excited," replied Fair, her eyes two glittering danger signals. "Are you in this plot, too, Monsieur André?"

"*Plot?* No, decidedly, this is fever! Let me feel your hands, *mon enfant*——"

"Don't touch me, please," said Fair, clearly and distinctly.

"Did I say fever? But it is delirium! I am not to touch you?"

"No." She took a step farther away from Laure who stood looking down at her, clear and quiet, with that incredulous lift to her brows. "Don't pretend any more, please; it makes me rather sick. I know about everything, you see."

"That is very exactly what I do not do, *ma petite.* No, André, do not go—you, too, will wait and see. What is this nonsense, Fair?"

"You needn't keep it up any longer, I tell you," returned Fair fiercely. "I've found out what you and Monsieur de Lautrec have been doing. I thought that you loved me, Laure—you did it pretty well—and all the time you were nothing but fortune hunters, were you?"

"You told Philippe—that?" asked Laure. Every atom of colour had drained out of her face, but she did not lift her voice. "No, wait, André. I am not yet through. It would be a good hunter

who could find your fortune, Fairfax. You have none to hunt for."

"I have two million dollars," said Fair.

"You have not half a million centimes. It was all in cotton, that great fortune; it is gone. Your lawyers had cabled to you while you were ill in Germany, but the doctors they said you must not hear that bad news then; they asked me to tell you, gently, when you were much better. So I have waited, and Philippe, he has cabled three—no, four times, to see whether skill and thought and work might not save that so mighty fortune. To-day he thought perhaps that we might have heard——"

"Oh," said Fair in a small, childish voice. "Oh." She put her hand to her head; it hurt dreadfully. "Well, then, I can go to work——" She made a vague gesture, as though if she stretched out her hand work would be there for her to cling to—and Laure smiled, a fine, cruel little smile. Something snapped in Fair's head. "That sounds ridiculous, doesn't it, Laure? But you see, I'm not over six feet tall, I'm not stronger than steel—I'm not busy twelve hours a day sitting around in the sun being an ex-hero—so I'm going to work."

"Did you, perhaps, tell my brother that you thought that of him, too?" asked Laure.

"I told him that, and I told him more," said Fair.

Laure came toward her, something so terrible in her white face that for a moment Fair thought that she was going to kill her.

"Little fool!" she said very softly. "Little, wicked, wicked fool, Philippe cannot work—Philippe is blind."

"No!" cried Fair. She clapped her hands over her ears, to shut out those dreadful words, her face a twisted mask of terror. "No, no, no!"

"And I tell you yes, yes, yes," repeated the tall girl before her, closing her long fingers over the small wrists, wrenching the clinging hands down relentlessly. "Blind like a stone, I tell you—blind."

"He couldn't be—he couldn't be—I'd have seen——"

"What have you ever seen that did not touch yourself?" asked Philippe's sister. "He is blind, but not so blind as you. When you came to us, never, never did we think that you would not see, though we could not talk of it—not yet. But Philippe—Philippe he said: 'No, no—let her alone. She has need of peace and mirth and sunshine, those doctors said—darkness it must not touch her. We will be careful, and perhaps she will not know.' You have well repaid that care, have you not, Fairfax?"

"But his eyes—his eyes——"

"His eyes—because they are still there, you

think they see? They saw too much, those eyes; they see no more. What made the light behind them—that nerve behind them—it is paralyzed. You who know so much about the war, you do not know that shock could do that? That there are men blind because their eyes turned rebel, and they would see no more horror—deaf because they would not hear more horror—dumb because they could not tell their horror. Philippe—Philippe he loved beauty—and after a long while his eyes they went mad—and he is blind. Work—work, you little fool! All day, all night, he works, he works. To learn to read—to learn to write—to learn to live, to live, you hear——"

"Please let me go, Laure," whispered Fair. "Please, Laure—please, Laure."

"I will tell Marie Léontine to help you with your packing," said Laure. "And I am glad indeed to let you go. Come, André."

Fair watched them cutting across the garden to the east entrance—not the terrace, not the terrace. She couldn't run any more—she felt as though she could never run again—but perhaps if she started now and went very carefully, holding to the lime trees, she could get there before he left. She must, she must get there before he left. . . . Not until she was at the steps did she dare to raise her eyes. He was still there.

"Laure?" he called. "Laure?"

"It's Fair," she said. "I came back."

She saw him grind the paper between his hands —and then he turned toward her, smiling a little.

"You had forgotten something?"

"Yes." She was quite near now, but her voice was so low that it barely reached him. "I came back to tell you—to tell you——"

The smile deepened on the dark young face. "Ah, *tiens!* There was something, then, that you forgot to tell me? Never should I have said it!"

"Please," she entreated, in that shadow of a voice. "Please. I know now about—about—Laure told me!"

"About why I lie like that cat in the sun? Good! Now you tell Laure——" He broke off sharply. "She was not kind, our Laure? You are weeping? Do not weep; those little jewels of tears, so small, so shining, so empty, empty—you women love them best of all your jewels, I think. But me, I do not think that they become you best!"

"I don't cry often," Fair told him. "Not often, really. You can ask Dad—no, no—not Dad. It's because I'm tired, probably. I came back because I wanted to tell you——" She swallowed despairingly, the tears salt on her lips.

"Why, because you were a good child," he

helped her gaily. "And wanted to tell me that you were sorry."

"No—no. Because I wanted to tell you that I was glad."

"*Glad?*" He was on his feet, with that cry.

"How could I be sorry for you, Philippe? Oh, I can't be sorry for myself—not even now—not now, when I see myself. I wanted so to be proud of you—you don't know—you don't—you don't——"

"And why did you so want to be proud of me, may I ask?"

"Because I love you," said Fair clearly.

Philippe le Gai caught at the cushioned chair. "You are mad," he said.

"Yes." The voice tripped in its haste. "Yes, but you see I had to tell you. You mustn't mind; I'm going this afternoon—Marie Léontine's waiting now. Don't mind, please, Philippe; I didn't know, myself, truly—not till Laure told me about—about you, and I knew that I didn't care at all how horrible and vile I had been, because I was so glad that you—that you——"

"Hush!" He stood quite still, and then he raised his hand to his eyes. "I should send you far from me, Fairfax."

"Yes," said Fair, "I'm not any good, you see. All I had to give you was my money and my—my

prettiness. I can't give you either of them, Philippe."

"When I heard you laugh, that first night when you came," he told her, "I remembered—I remembered that laughter was not just a sound to cover up despair—I remembered how to laugh that night."

She stared at him, voiceless.

"When you spoke to me—when you spoke to me, my Music—I was glad then that I could not see, because I wished to listen only, always."

"Philippe," she prayed. "Don't, don't send me away, Philippe."

"We are mad," he said. "Come closer."

And once more she went toward him across that sunlit space, to where he stood, tall and splendid and terrible. "Closer still," he said. "Closer still—still closer. Why do you weep, my Laughter?"

"Hold me—hold me—don't let me go."

"Blindness," he said. "It is just a little word, a little, dark, ugly word to frighten foolish children. Are you beautiful, my Loveliness? Never, never could you be beautiful as I dream you!" He touched her lips with his brown fingers.

"Smile!" he said. And she smiled.

"What is blindness to me who can touch your lips to laughter?" he asked her, bending his black head until his lips swept her lashes. "What is

blindness to me, who can touch your eyes to tears?"

The sunlight fell across the bright hair of the last of the fighting Carters—he could feel it warm against his lips and suddenly he laughed aloud.

"What is blindness to me?" cried Philippe le Gai to the golden sun. "What is blindness to me, who hold my light against my heart?"

GREEN GARDENS

DAPHNE was singing to herself when she came through the painted gate in the back wall. She was singing partly because it was June, and Devon, and she was seventeen, and partly because she had caught a breath-taking glimpse of herself in the long mirror as she had flashed through the hall at home, and it seemed almost too good to be true that the radiant small person in the green muslin frock with the wreath of golden hair bound about her head and the sea-blue eyes laughing back at her was really Miss Daphne Chiltern. Incredible, incredible luck to look like that, half Dryad, half Kate Greenaway—she danced down the turf path to the herb garden, swinging her great wicker basket and singing like a mad thing.

"He promised to buy me a bonnie blue ribbon," carolled Daphne, all her ribbons flying,

> "He promised to buy me a bonnie blue ribbon,
> He promised to buy me a bonnie blue ribbon
> To tie up——"

The song stopped as abruptly as though someone had struck it from her lips. A strange man was kneeling by the beehive in the herb garden. He was looking at her over his shoulder, at once startled and amused, and she saw that he was wearing a rather shabby tweed suit and that his face was brown against his close-cropped tawny hair. He smiled, his teeth a strong flash of white.

"Hello!" he greeted her, in a tone at once casual and friendly.

Daphne returned the smile uncertainly. "Hello," she replied gravely.

The strange man rose easily to his feet, and she saw that he was very tall and carried his head rather splendidly, like the young bronze Greek in Uncle Roland's study at home. But his eyes—his eyes were strange—quite dark and burned out. The rest of him looked young and vivid and adventurous, but his eyes looked as though the adventure were over, though they were still questing.

"Were you looking for any one?" she asked, and the man shook his head, laughing.

"No one in particular, unless it was you."

Daphne's soft brow darkened. "It couldn't possibly have been me," she said in a stately small voice, "because, you see, I don't know you. Perhaps you didn't know that there is no one living in Green Gardens now?"

"Oh, yes, I knew. The Fanes have left for Ceylon, haven't they?"

"Sir Harry left two weeks ago, because he had to see the old governor before he sailed, but Lady Audrey only left last week. She had to close the London house, too, so there was a great deal to do."

"I see. And so Green Gardens is deserted?"

"It is sold," said Daphne, with a small quaver in her voice, "just this afternoon. I came over to say good-bye to it, and to get some mint and lavender from the garden."

"Sold?" repeated the man, and there was an agony of incredulity in the stunned whisper. He flung out his arm against the sun-warmed bricks of the high wall as though to hold off some invader. "No, no; they'd never dare to sell it."

"I'm glad you mind so much," said Daphne. "It's strange that nobody minds but us, isn't it? I cried at first—and then I thought that it would be happier if it wasn't lonely and empty, poor dear—and then, it was such a beautiful day, that I forgot to be unhappy."

The man bestowed a wrenched smile on her. "You hardly conveyed the impression of unrelieved gloom as you came around that corner," he assured her.

"I—I haven't a very good memory for being unhappy," Daphne confessed remorsefully, a guilty

rose staining her to her brow at the memory of that exultant chant.

He threw back his head with a sudden shout of laughter.

"These are glad tidings! I'd rather find a pagan than a Puritan at Green Gardens any day. Let's both have a poor memory. Do you mind if I smoke?"

"No," she replied, "but do you mind if I ask you what you are doing here?"

"Not a bit." He lit the stubby brown pipe, curving his hand dexterously to shelter it from the little breeze. He had the most beautiful hands that she had ever seen, slim and brown and fine; they looked as though they would be miraculously strong—and miraculously gentle. "I came to see whether there was 'honey still for tea,' Mistress Dryad!"

"Honey—for tea?" she echoed wonderingly. "Was that why you were looking at the hive?"

He puffed meditatively. "Well—partly. It's a quotation from a poem. Ever read Rupert Brooke?"

"Oh, yes, yes." Her voice tripped in its eagerness. "I know one by heart—

> "'If I should die think only this of me:
> That there's some corner of a foreign field
> That is for ever England. That shall be——'"

He cut in on the magical little voice roughly.

"Ah, what damned nonsense! Do you suppose he's happy, in his foreign field, that golden lover? Why shouldn't even the dead be homesick? No, no—he was sick for home in Germany when he wrote that poem of mine—he's sicker for it in Heaven, I'll warrant." He pulled himself up swiftly at the look of amazement in Daphne's eyes. "I've clean forgotten my manners," he confessed ruefully. "No, don't get that flying look in your eyes; I swear that I'll be good. It's a long time—it's a long time since I've talked to any one who needed gentleness. If you knew what need I had of it, you'd stay a little while, I think."

"Of course I'll stay," she said. "I'd love to, if you want me to."

"I want you to more than I've ever wanted anything that I can remember." His tone was so matter-of-fact that Daphne thought that she must have imagined the words. "Now, can't we make ourselves comfortable for a little while? I'd feel safer if you weren't standing there ready for instant flight! Here's a nice bit of grass—and the wall for a back——"

Daphne glanced anxiously at the green muslin frock. "It's—it's pretty hard to be comfortable without cushions," she submitted diffidently.

The man yielded again to laughter. "Are even

Dryads afraid to spoil their frocks? Cushions it shall be. There are some extra ones in the chest in the East Indian room, aren't there?"

Daphne let the basket slip through her fingers, her eyes black through sheer surprise.

"But how did you know—how did you know about the lacquer chest?" she whispered breathlessly.

"Oh, devil take me for a blundering ass!" He stood considering her forlornly for a moment, and then shrugged his shoulders, with the brilliant and disarming smile. "The game's up, thanks to my inspired lunacy! But I'm going to trust you not to say that you've seen me. I know about the lacquer chest because I always kept my marbles there."

"Are you Stephen Fane?"

At the awed whisper the man bowed low, all mocking grace, his hand on his heart, the sun burnishing his tawny head.

"Oh-h!" breathed Daphne. She bent to pick up the wicker basket, her small face white and hard.

"Wait!" said Stephen Fane. His face was white and hard, too. "You are right to go—entirely, absolutely right—but I am going to beg you to stay. I don't know what you've heard about me; however vile it is, it's less than the truth——"

"I have heard nothing of you," said Daphne, holding her gold-wreathed head high, "but five years ago I was not allowed to come to Green Gardens for weeks because I mentioned your name. I was told that it was not a name to pass decent lips."

Something terrible leaped in those burned-out eyes, and died.

"I had not thought they would use their hate to lash a child," he said. "They were quite right—and you, too. Good-night."

"Good-night," replied Daphne clearly. She started down the path, but at its bend she turned to look back—because she was seventeen, and it was June, and she remembered his laughter. He was standing quite still by the golden straw beehive, but he had thrown one arm across his eyes, as though to shut out some intolerable sight. And then, with a soft little rush, she was standing beside him.

"How—how do we get the cushions?" she demanded breathlessly.

Stephen Fane dropped his arm, and Daphne drew back a little at the sudden blaze of wonder in his face.

"Oh," he whispered voicelessly. "Oh, you Loveliness!" He took a step toward her, and then stood still, clinching his brown hands. Then

he thrust them deep in his pockets, standing very straight. "I do think," he said carefully, "I do think you had better go. The fact that I have tried to make you stay simply proves the particular type of rotter that I am. Good-bye—I'll never forget that you came back."

"I am not going," said Daphne sternly. "Not if you beg me. Because you need me. And no matter how many wicked things you have done, there can't be anything as wicked as going away when someone needs you. How do we get the cushions?"

"Oh, my wise Dryad!" His voice broke on laughter, but Daphne saw that his lashes were suddenly bright with tears. "Stay, then—why, even I cannot harm you. God himself can't grudge me this little space of wonder: He knows how far I've come for it—how I've fought and struggled and ached to win it—how in dirty lands and dirty places I've dreamed of summer twilight in a still garden—and England!"

"Didn't you dream of me?" asked Daphne wistfully, with a little catch of reproach.

He laughed again unsteadily. "Why, who could ever dream of you, my Wonder? You are a thousand thousand dreams come true."

Daphne bestowed on him a tremulous and radiant smile. "Please let us get the cushions. I think I am a little tired."

"And I am a graceless fool! There used to be a pane of glass cut out in one of the south casement windows. Shall we try that?"

"Please, yes. How did you find it, Stephen?" She saw again that thrill of wonder on his face, but his voice was quite steady.

"I didn't find it; I did it! It was uncommonly useful, getting in that way sometimes, I can tell you. And, by the Lord Harry, here it is. Wait a minute, Loveliness; I'll get through and open the south door for you—no chance that way of spoiling the frock." He swung himself up with the sure grace of a cat, smiled at her—vanished—it was hardly a minute later that she heard the bolts dragging back in the south door, and he flung it wide.

The sunlight streamed in through the deep hall and stretched hesitant fingers into the dusty quiet of the great East Indian room, gilding the soft tones of the faded chintz, touching very gently the polished furniture and the dim prints on the walls. He swung across the threshold without a word, Daphne tiptoeing behind him.

"How still it is," he said in a hushed voice. "How sweet it smells!"

"It's the potpourri in the Canton jars," she told him shyly. "I always made it every summer for Lady Audrey; she thought I did it better than any one else. I think so, too." She flushed at the

mirth in his eyes, but held her ground sturdily. "Flowers are sweeter for you if you love them—even dead ones," she explained bravely.

"They would be dead, indeed, if they were not sweet for you." Her cheeks burned bright at the low intensity of his voice, but he turned suddenly away. "Oh, there she sails—there she sails still, my beauty. Isn't she the proud one, though—straight into the wind!" He hung over the little ship model, thrilled as any child. "*The Flying Lady;* see where it's painted on her? Grandfather gave it to me when I was seven—he had it from his father when he was six. Lord, how proud I was!" He stood back to see it better, frowning a little. "One of those ropes is wrong; any fool could tell that." His hands hovered over it for a moment—dropped. "No matter—the new owners are probably not seafarers! The lacquer chest is at the far end, isn't it? Yes, here. Are three enough—four? We're off!" But still he lingered, sweeping the great room with his dark eyes. "It's full of all kinds of junk; they never liked it—no period, you see. I had the run of it—I loved it as though it were alive; it was alive for me. From Elizabeth's day down, all the family adventurers brought their treasures here—beaten gold and hammered silver, mother-of-pearl and peacock feathers, strange woods and stranger

spices, porcelains and embroideries and blown glass. There was always an adventurer somewhere in each generation—and however far he wandered, he came back to Green Gardens to bring his treasures home. When I was a yellow-headed imp of Satan, hiding my marbles in the lacquer chest, I used to swear that when I grew up I would bring home the finest treasure of all, if I had to search the world from end to end. And now the last adventurer has come home to Green Gardens —and he has searched the world from end to end—and he is empty-handed."

"No, no," whispered Daphne. "He has brought home the greatest treasure of all, that adventurer. He has brought home the beaten gold of his love and the hammered silver of his dreams—and he has brought them from very far."

"He had brought greater treasures than those to you, lucky room," said the last of the adventurers. "You can never be sad again; you will always be gay and proud—because for just one moment he brought you the gold of her hair and the silver of her voice."

"He is talking great nonsense, room," said a very small voice, "but it is beautiful nonsense, and I am a wicked girl, and I hope that he will talk some more. And please, I think we will go into the garden and see."

All the way back down the flagged path to the herb garden they were quiet; even after he had arranged the cushions against the rose-red wall, even after he had stretched out at full length beside her and lighted another pipe.

After a while he said, staring at the straw hive: "There used to be a jolly little fat brown one that was a great pal of mine. How long do bees live?"

"I don't know," she answered vaguely, and after a long pause, full of quiet, pleasant odours from the herb garden, and the happy noises of small things tucking themselves away for the night, and the faint drift of tobacco smoke, she asked: "What was it about 'honey still for tea'?"

"Oh, that!" He raised himself on one elbow so that he could see her better. "It was a poem I came across while I was in East Africa; someone sent a copy of Rupert Brooke's things to a chap out there, and this one fastened itself around me like a vise. It starts where he's sitting in a café in Berlin with a lot of German Jews around him, swallowing down their beer; and suddenly he remembers. All the lost, unforgettable beauty comes back to him in that dirty place; it gets him by the throat. It got me, too.

"'Ah, God! to see the branches stir
Across the moon at Grantchester!
To smell the thrilling-sweet and rotten

Unforgettable, unforgotten
River-smell, and hear the breeze
Sobbing in the little trees. . . .
Oh, is the water sweet and cool,
Gentle and brown, above the pool?
And laughs the immortal river still
Under the mill, under the mill?
Say, is there Beauty yet to find?
And Certainty? and Quiet kind?
Deep meadows yet, for to forget
The lies, and truths, and pain? . . . oh, yet
Stands the Church clock at ten to three?
And is there honey still for tea?'"

"That's beautiful," she said, "but it hurts."

"Thank God you'll never know how it hurts, little Golden Heart in quiet gardens. But for some of us, caught like rats in the trap of the ugly fever we called living, it was black torture, and yet our dear delight to remember the deep meadows we had lost—to wonder if there was honey still for tea."

"Stephen, won't you tell me about it—won't that help?"

And suddenly someone else looked at her through those haunted eyes—a little boy, terrified and forsaken. "Oh, I have no right to soil you with it. But I came back to tell someone about it;I had to. I had to wait until Father and Audrey went away. I knew they'd hate to see me—she was my step-mother, you know, and she always

loathed me, and he never cared. In East Africa I used to stay awake at night thinking that I might die, and that no one in England would ever care; no one would know how I had loved her. It was worse than dying to think that."

"But why couldn't you come back to Green Gardens—why couldn't you make them see, Stephen?"

"Why, what was there to see? When they sent me down from Cambridge for that dirty little affair, I was only nineteen—and they told me I had disgraced my name and Green Gardens and my country—and I went mad with pride and shame, and swore I'd drag their precious name through the dirt of every country in the world. And I did —and I did."

His head was buried in his arms, but Daphne heard. It seemed strange indeed to her that she felt no shrinking and no terror; only great pity for what he had lost, great grief for what he might have had. For a minute she forgot that she was Daphne, the heedless and gay-hearted, and that he was a broken and an evil man. For a minute he was a little lad, and she was his lost mother.

"Don't mind, Stephen," she whispered to him, "don't mind. Now you have come home; now it is all done with, that ugliness. Please, please don't mind."

"No, no," said the stricken voice, "you don't know, you don't know, thank God. But I swear I've paid—I swear I have. When the others used to take their dirty drugs to make them forget, they'd dream of strange paradises, unknown heavens; but through the haze and mist that they brought, I would remember—I would remember. The filth and the vileness would fade and dissolve —and I would see the sun-dial, with the roses on it, warm in the sun, and smell the clove pinks in the kitchen border, and touch the cresses by the brook, cool and green and wet. All the sullen drums and whining flutes would sink to silence, and I would hear the little yellow-headed cousin of the vicar singing in the twilight, singing. 'Weep you no more, sad fountains' and 'Hark, hark, the lark.' And the painted yellow faces and the little wicked hands and perfumed fans would vanish and I would see again the gay beauty of the lady who hung above the mantel in the long drawing room, the lady who laughed across the centuries in her white muslin frock, with eyes that matched the blue ribbon in her wind-blown curls—the lady who was as young and lovely as England, for all the years! Oh, I would remember, I would remember! It was twilight, and I was hurrying home through the dusk after tennis at the rectory; there was a bell ringing quietly somewhere, and

a moth flying by brushed against my face with velvet—and I could smell the hawthorn hedge glimmering white, and see the first star swinging low above the trees, and lower still, and brighter still, the lights of home. . . . And then before my very eyes they would fade, they would fade, dimmer and dimmer—they would flicker and go out, and I would be back again, with tawdriness and shame and vileness fast about me; and I would pay."

"But now you have paid enough," Daphne told him. "Oh, surely, surely, you have paid enough. Now you have come home—now you can forget."

"No," said Stephen Fane. "Now I must go."

"Go?" At the startled echo he raised his head.

"What else?" he asked. "Did you think that I would stay?"

"But I do not want you to go." Her lips were white, but she spoke very clearly.

Stephen Fane never moved, but his eyes, dark and wondering, rested on her like a caress.

"Oh, my little Loveliness, what dream is this?"

"You must not go away again; you must not."

"I am baser than I thought," he said, very low. "I have made you pity me, I who forfeited your lovely pity this long time. It cannot even touch me now. I have sat here like a dark Othello telling tales to a small white Desdemona, and you, God

help me, have thought me tragic and abused. You shall not think that. In a few minutes I will be gone; I'll not have you waste a dream on me. Listen; there is nothing vile that I've not done—nothing, do you hear? Not clean sin, like murder; I've cheated at cards, and played with loaded dice, and stolen the rings off the fingers of an Argentine Jewess who——" His voice twisted and broke before the lovely mercy in the frightened eyes that still met his so bravely.

"Why, Stephen?"

"So that I could buy my dreams. So that I could purchase peace with little dabs of brown in a pipe-bowl, little puffs of white in the palm of my hand, little drops of liquid on a ball of cotton. So that I could drug myself with dirt—and forget the dirt and remember England."

He rose to his feet with that swift grace of his, and Daphne rose, too, slowly.

"I am going now; will you walk to the gate with me?"

He matched his long step to hers, watching the troubled wonder on her face intently.

"How old are you, my Dryad?"

"I am seventeen."

"Seventeen! Oh, God be good to us, I had forgotten that one could be seventeen. What's that?"

He paused, suddenly alert, listening to a distant whistle, sweet on the summer air.

"Oh, that—that is Robin."

"Ah——" His smile flashed, tender and ironic. "And who is Robin?"

"He is—just Robin. He is down from Cambridge for a week, and I told him that he might walk home with me."

"Then I must be off quickly. Is he coming to this gate?"

"No, to the south one."

"Listen to me, my Dryad—are you listening?" For her face was turned away.

"Yes," said Daphne.

"You are going to forget me, to forget this afternoon, to forget everything but Robin whistling through the summer twilight."

"No," said Daphne.

"Yes; because you have a very poor memory about unhappy things! You told me so. But just for a minute after I have gone you will remember that now all is very well with me, because I have found the deep meadows—and honey still for tea—and you. You are to remember that for just one minute, will you? And now good-bye——"

She tried to say the words, but she could not. For a moment he stood staring down at the

white pathos of the small face, and then he turned away. But when he came to the gate, he paused and put his arms about the wall, as though he would never let it go, laying his cheek against the sun-warmed bricks, his eyes fast closed. The whistling came nearer, and he stirred, put his hand on the little painted gate, vaulted across it lightly, and was gone. She turned at Robin's quick step on the walk.

"Ready, dear? What are you staring at?"

"Nothing. Robin, did you ever hear of Stephen Fane?"

He nodded grimly.

"Do you know—do you know what he is doing now?"

"Doing now?" He stared at her blankly. "What on earth do you mean? He's been dead for months; killed in the campaign in East Africa—only decent thing he ever did in his life. Why?"

Daphne never stirred. She stood quite still, staring at the painted gate. Then she said, very carefully: "Someone thought—someone thought that they had seen him—quite lately."

Robin laughed comfortingly. "No use looking so scared about it, my blessed child. Perhaps they did. The War Office made all kinds of ghastly blunders; it was a quick step from 'missing in action' to 'killed.' And he probably would

have been jolly glad of a chance to drop out quietly and have everyone think he was done for."

Daphne never took her eyes from the gate. "Yes," she said quietly, "I suppose he would. Will you get my basket, Robin? I left it by the beehive. There are some cushions that belong in the East Indian room, too. The south door is open."

When he had gone, she stood shaking for a moment, listening to his footsteps die away, and then she flew to the gate, searching the twilight desperately with straining eyes. There was no one there—no one at all—but then the turn in the lane would have hidden him by now. And suddenly terror fell from her like a cloak.

She turned swiftly to the brick wall, straining up, up on tiptoes, to lay her cheek against its roughened surface, to touch it very gently with her lips. She could hear Robin whistling down the path, but she did not turn. She was bidding farewell to Green Gardens—and the last adventurer.

DELILAH

"BUT what is she like?" asked O'Hara impatiently. "Man alive, you've seen her, haven't you? Sat next to her at dinner at the Embassy last night, didn't you? Well, then, for the love of the Saints, what's the creature like?"

De Nemours shrugged his shoulders, raising whimsical eyebrows at the slim young giant towering above him.

"*Mon cher,* one cannot put the lady into two words. Voyons—she is, as our Alfred so charmingly puts it, blonde like the wheat——"

"Oh, rot." The ardent voice of the British representative was curt to the point of rudeness, and De Nemour's smile became exquisitely courteous. "I don't care whether she's an albino. She's the American representative on this committee, and I'm interested in her mental qualifications. Is she intelligent?"

"Intelligent! Ah, my poor friend, she is far, far worse." His smile grew reminiscent as he lit his cigarette. "She has a wit like a shining sword, and eyelashes of a truly fantastic length."

"And every time her eyes shine you think it's the sword," commented O'Hara bitterly. "God, this is hideous! I can see her sitting there chattering epigrams and fluttering dimples——"

"You do Mrs. Lindsay an injustice," said another voice quietly, and O'Hara swung around with a slight start.

"Oh, Celati, I clean forgot that you were there. I thought that you had never met the lady."

"Unfortunately for me, you are entirely correct. But last night I came in after the dinner for some bridge, and I watched Mrs. Lindsay with great interest, with great admiration, for more than half an hour. There was a most fat Senator from the South talking to her, and she was listening. I say *listening*, mark. In this great country the most charming of women feel that they have already acquired all desirable information and wisdom and that it is their not unpainful function to disseminate it. I find that it makes intercourse more exciting than flattering. But Mrs. Lindsay was—listening."

"You mean to say that she said nothing at all in half an hour?" O'Hara's tone was flatly incredulous.

"Oh, *si, si,* she spoke three times—and if one may judge by the human countenance, I dare to

wager that that most fat Senator thought that never woman spoke more wittily or wisely."

"And we are to have the jewels?"

"But surely. She said after the first ten minutes, 'Oh, but do go on!' and after the next, 'But what happened then?' and after the third 'Good-night—and thank you.' May I have a light, De Nemours? Thanks!"

"And those—those are the epigrams?" O'Hara threw back his head and laughed—a sudden boyish shout, oddly at variance with his stern young face.

"Ah," murmured Celati, a reminiscent and enigmatic smile touching his lips, "you should have heard her voice!"

O'Hara's smile vanished abruptly. He came perilously near scowling as he stood staring down at the inscrutable Latin countenances blandly presented for inspection. De Nemours permitted a flicker of genial appreciation to warm his cold eyes, the tribute of a highly distinguished connoisseur. Truly, this young Irishman, he was of a magnificence. No collector of beauty in all its forms could remain unmoved by the sight of that superb head—that more than superb body. Praxiteles Hermes turned gypsy! One of those Celts with obviously Spanish blood running hot and cold through their veins. The cool appraisal

hovered for the moment on the verge of interest—flickered out. De Nemours was quite definitely convinced that not one man in a thousand was deserving of interest, and he had found little in an extremely varied experience to shake his conclusions.

"An exquisite voice," he agreed pleasantly. "It will turn our dullest statistics to madrigals. The gods are merciful."

O'Hara swung his chair to the table, protest bitter in his stormy gray eyes and on his quick tongue. These damned foreigners!

"You don't seem to grasp the situation. We are here to settle matters of vital urgency, not to conduct a salon. Our reports on the various insurgent activities throughout our countries are to be test cases for the world. We're not only to report conditions but to suggest solutions. Think, man, think! This room may be the laboratory where we will discover the formula to heal a world that's near to dying. Can you turn that into an epigram or a jest?"

"No," said De Nemours softly, and he looked suddenly very tired and very old, "that is no epigram, Monsieur O'Hara—that is no jest. Ah, my country, my country." His voice was hardly above a whisper, but in the cold and bitter eyes there was something that wailed aloud.

"Yes, my country," O'Hara retorted fiercely, "but more than that. There are five members of this Committee—not four."

"Not four?" Celati's level voice was suddenly sharp.

"Not four. There will be represented at this table Great Britain, France, Italy, the United States—and Humanity. The greatest of these, gentlemen, will have no voice."

"*Au bonheur!*" commented De Nemours affably. "It, unlike Mrs. Lindsay, might not sing us madrigals."

O'Hara brought his clenched fist down on the table with a gesture at once despairing and menacing. "Now by the Lord," he said, his voice oddly shaken, "if this woman——"

The door into the hall opened very quietly, closed more quietly still, and Delilah Lindsay stood facing them, her hand still on the knob.

"I knocked twice," she said softly. "The woodwork must be very thick."

O'Hara rose slowly to his feet. Celati and De Nemours had already found theirs.

"Good evening," he said, "it's not quite the hour, I believe." He was fighting an absurd and overwhelming impulse—an impulse to reply with perfect candour, "The woodwork is not thick at all. Were you listening at that door?"

For a moment, hardly longer, Delilah stood quite still. It was long enough to stamp on every mind present an indelible picture of the primrose-yellow head shining out against the dark panels; therefore, long enough for all practical purposes. She released the door-knob, smiling very faintly.

"It is unfortunate for a man to be late," she replied, "but unpardonable for a woman. We have so much time of our own to waste that we must be very careful not to waste that of others. *Bon soir*, De Nemours."

She crossed the room with her light, unhurried tread, and stopped, serenely gracious, before O'Hara.

"You are the British representative, are you not? It is very stupid of me, but I don't believe that I have heard your name."

"You have heard it a good hundred times," thought the British representative grimly.

"Madame, permit that I present to you Mr. O'Hara."

"Mr. O'Hara?" Her smile was suddenly as winningly mischievous as a child's. "That's a grand name entirely for an Englishman."

O'Hara's eyes were ice gray. "I'm no Englishman, Mrs. Lindsay. But some of us in Ireland hold still that we are part of Great Britain though the Colonials may have seen fit to forget it."

The velvety eyes lifted to his were warm with sympathy and concern. "That's splendid of you; we hear so much bitterness amongst the Irish here, and somehow it seems—ugly. After all, as you say, no matter what she may do—or has done—England is England! But I am distressed to hear that there has been disloyalty elsewhere. You think Canada—Australia?"

"I think neither. It was of other children of England that I was thinking, Mrs. Lindsay—ungrateful and rebellious children."

"Oh, how stupid. Egypt, of course, and India. But, after all, they are only adopted children, aren't they? Perhaps if we give them time they'll grow to be as loyal and steadfast and dependable as you yourselves. *Pazienza*——"

"I was not——"

She raised a protesting hand, gay and imperious. "No, no, don't even bother to deny it. You must be discreet, I know—indeed, indeed I honour you for it." She turned to De Nemours, the sparkling face suddenly grave. "But we must not be forgetting; we are here to discuss more vital matters than England's colonial policy, vital as that may well be. Will you forgive us—and present my colleague from Italy?"

"Mrs. Lindsay, Signor Celati." Both De Nemours and Celati were struggling with counte-

nances not habitually slaves to mirth, but the look of stony and incredulous amazement on O'Hara's expressive visage was enough to undermine the Sphinx.

By what miracle of dexterity had she turned the tables on him, leaving him gracefully rebuked for triviality—he, the prophet and crusader? And by what magic had she transformed his very palpable hit at the recalcitrant Americans into a boomerang? He drew a long breath. This woman—this woman was so unscrupulously clever that she could afford to seem stupid. That rendered her pretty nearly invulnerable. The stormy eyes grew still—narrowed intently—smiled.

"Mrs. Lindsay is entirely right," he agreed. "Let us get to business; Heaven knows that we have enough of it to get through! Mrs. Lindsay, we have gone over a certain amount of ground in your unavoidable absence. I regret——"

"I, too, regret it," she said quietly. "But it is, as you say, unavoidable. I was greatly honoured by the Government's choice, but it was impossible for me to drop the Oregon investigations at that stage. If I could have the minutes of the previous meetings——"

"We have no minutes. It has been decided to dispense with the services of a stenographer, as the matters handled are of really incalculable deli-

cacy. Each of us, however, keeps an abstract of the proceedings, which we check up together, in order to prevent any possible misunderstandings. These are at your disposal, naturally."

"I see. Then if it will not be too much trouble, I'll run through yours. It will only be necessary to see one lot, if they have been checked, of course. Shall we begin where you left off, then? And shall I take this chair? I'm quite ready. I left my hat and cloak and such feminine trappings downstairs. What is under discussion?"

"I'll have the report for you at the next meeting," said O'Hara. "We were thrashing out the situation in Rome. You think that the Pope will influence the Blacks to vote against the commonist element, Celati? That's unusual, isn't it? A distinct return to temporal power?"

"Unusual, yes. A return to temporal power? Possibly. But the Vatican contends that it is a spiritual and social matter rather than a political matter. It seems——"

For a moment—for more than a moment O'Hara lost track of the even, unemotional voice. He was watching, with a blazing and concentrated curiosity, the face of the American representative. Mrs. Lindsay was listening to the Italian with rapt interest, but O'Hara could have sworn that it was the same interest, fascinated and indulgent, which

an intelligent small child bestows on a grown-up telling fairy tales—an interest which whispers "It's so pretty—let's pretend it's true!" She looked almost like a small child as she sat facing him across the darkly shining table; almost like a small boy. Her thick, soft hair was cut short and framed her face like a little mediæval page's—straight across the low white forehead, curling strongly under about her ears. The blue jacket with its white Eton collar and narrow cuffs was boyish, too. And the chin—O'Hara pulled himself up, frowning. He was mad! His cousin Norah was boyish, if you like, with her honest freckled face and puppy eyes, and red hands—but this small smooth creature could clip her shining hair to its roots—it would only betray the eternal feminine more damningly. No stiff collar would ever do anything but accentuate the velvety darkness of her eyes, the pure beauty of the wistful mouth. Possibly that was why she wore it! He caught back a grim smile as the velvet eyes met his.

"It's desperately awkward, of course," said the voice that De Nemours had accurately described as exquisite. "What solution would you suggest, Mr. O'Hara?"

"I am not yet prepared to offer a solution," Mr. O'Hara informed her a trifle stiffly. What in

the name of Gods and Devils had Celati been talking about, anyway?

"But after all," urged Mrs. Lindsay, "it comes down to a question of two alternatives, doesn't it? Which seems to you the lesser evil?"

"I prefer to wait until we hear a little more about it." His back was against the wall, but he thoroughly intended to die fighting.

"More about it? What more is there to hear?" Her amazement was so wide-eyed that it seemed almost impossible that it was not genuine. But if you had put thumb-screws to him, O'Hara would have maintained that in some inexplicable manner the small, demure, deferential fiend across the table was fully aware of the fact that he had not been listening—and fully prepared to make his unsuspicious colleagues aware of it, too.

"Part of it did not seem quite clear to me," he said curtly.

"Not clear?" repeated Celati, his imperturbable calm severely ruffled, "what do you say, not clear? You find my English at fault, possibly—certainly not my explanation. No child could do that."

"Surely not," agreed Mrs. Lindsay, and her voice was as soothing as a cool hand, "I confess that it struck me as—well—limpid. But perhaps Mr. O'Hara will tell us just what part of it he did not follow?"

"Put it," said O'Hara, with something perilously like hatred blazing in his eyes, "that I did not follow. We are simply wasting time. Will someone repeat the alternatives?"

Mrs. Lindsay's gravely solicitous eyes met the look unflinchingly. "Surely. All this is simply wasting time, as you say. It comes down to a question as to whether it is preferable for the Italian Government to countenance or discountenance the Papal entry into politics. In the present case it is naturally an asset, but it is possible that it might entail serious consequences. I put it baldly and clumsily, but I am trying to be quite clear."

"You are succeeding admirably," O'Hara assured her. He was dangerously angry, with the violent and sickening anger of a man who had been made a fool of—and who has richly deserved it. "As you say, it is—limpid. But why not a third alternative? Why should the Italian Government do anything at all? Why not simply lie quiet and play safe? It would not be for the first time."

"Mr. O'Hara!" Celati was on his feet, white to the lips.

Mrs. Lindsay stretched out her hands with a prettily eloquent gesture of despair. "Oh, really!" she said quietly. "Is this kind of thing necessary? We are all working together for the same purpose

—a purpose that has surely too much dignity to be degraded to such pettiness. Mr. O'Hara, I beg of you——"

"It is not necessary to beg of me." He leaned across the table, something boyish and winning in his face, his hand outstretched. "I say, Celati, I'm no end of a bounder; do let me off this once—I'm bone tired—haven't slept for nights, trying to think of ways through this beastly mess. I don't know what I'm saying, and that's Heaven's truth. Is it all right?"

"Quite. We are, I think, all tired."

"Men," Mrs. Lindsay murmured gently—"men are really wonderful. What two women would have done that?"

O'Hara considered her for a moment in silence.

"Is that a tribute you are paying us?" he inquired quite as gently.

"Why, what else?" Again the soft amazement.

"I was seeking information. It struck me as ambiguous."

Mrs. Lindsay smiled, that enigmatic smile, wistful and ironic. "It is undue humility on your part, believe me. But shan't we get back to the matter in hand? Monsieur De Nemours, what is your opinion?"

"I think there is much in Mr. O'Hara's sug-

gestion that the Government should not be over-precipitate," replied De Nemours pleasantly. He was horribly bored; politics, unless they concerned France, bored him almost beyond endurance, but his ennui was somewhat alleviated by the fact that a very pretty woman was asking him a question. "If silence were maintained for a few weeks, it might well be——"

O'Hara was listening—fiercely. He was sure that he could smell violets somewhere; why didn't the woman take her hands off the table? They lay there, white and fragile and helpless, like broken flowers. Why didn't she wear a wedding ring? Why—he jerked his tired mind back savagely to De Nemours' easy, fluent voice, his tired eyes to the worn but amiable mask that the Frenchman substituted for a face. Why didn't he stop talking?

"We, in France, have been learning tolerance to God as well as to man," he was saying. "Possibly before the war we have been drastic, but the truly remarkable revival——"

France again! France and Italy and Oregon—on and on and on—the clock on the mantel clicked away the minutes ruthlessly, the precious minutes that belonged to a dying world. It was striking eleven when Mrs. Lindsay rose.

"Then that's cleared up, I think," she said.

"We begin the regular routine to-morrow morning, don't we? Half-past nine? And here?"

"The house has been placed at my disposal," replied O'Hara formally. "I have placed it at the Committee's. It has proved a convenient arrangement."

"Are the night sessions usual?" she asked.

"Usual? I don't know." He looked at her wearily; how could any one emerge from that harrowing bickering and manœuvering so fresh and untouched and shining? "We have them when it seems necessary—how often should you say, De Nemours?"

"Never mind." The cool fingers were touching his; she was going. "I will keep my evenings free, too—I was simply wondering what to do about some invitations. But nothing else counts, of course, does it? Do get a good rest; you look so tired. Good-night." She smiled, nodded the golden head graciously, and was gone.

O'Hara stood gazing blankly at the closed door for a moment—then he swung across the room, flung the windows up with a carefully controlled violence, and stood leaning heavily against its frame, his shoulders sagging suddenly, his tired young face turned to the stars.

"You find it too warm?" De Nemours inquired courteously.

"No—I don't know. Those beastly violets——"

"Violets?" De Nemours waited with raised brows.

"The first time the poison gas came over at Ypres, the chap standing next to me said, 'Funny—there's a jolly smell of violets about.' Violets—God!" His voice twisted—broke. But after a minute he continued casually: "Rotten trick to have your senses go back on you like that, what? They're the little beggars Nature has given us for guards and watchmen and here one of them turns traitor and instead of shrieking 'Careful—careful—the ugliest poison ever found is touching you!' it whispers 'See, it smells of violets—oh, England—oh, Spring.' Damned traitors, the lot of them—for ever telling us that poison is sweet!"

"Why, so it is," murmured De Nemours. "Many and many a time. But where were the violets to-night, *mon ami?*"

O'Hara jerked about incredulously, "What! you didn't smell them? Why, every time she moved the air was thick with them!"

"Ah, Youth!" Irony and regret tempered the low laughter. "One must be young indeed to smell violets when a woman moves!"

Celati stirred slightly. "A most remarkable woman, this Mrs. Lindsay."

"Remarkable, indeed. There is something about her fine and direct——"

O'Hara stared at him aghast. "Direct? Man, but you're mad! The woman's tortuous as a winding lane—and it's a dark place it leads to, I'm thinking."

De Nemours yielded once more to indulgent mirth, "*Pauvre ami*, those nerves of yours play tricks with you! Mrs. Lindsay is a woman with an exceptional mind of which she makes exceptional use. She is a beautiful woman, but alas, she does not remind you of it. She is entirely devoted to her work, she shows tact and courage, a rare discretion, a fine simplicity——"

"Oh, God!" There was something very like despair in O'Hara's mirth. "Simplicity, by the Almighty! Because she wears blue serge instead of white lace? Why, I tell you that she trails yards of chiffon behind her when she goes, that her eyes are for ever smiling at you over a scented fan, that there's always a rose in her hair and a kiss on her lips. She's just as simple as Eve—and she still has fast hold of the apple!"

Celati eyed him a trifle sternly. "You object to women in politics, Mr. O'Hara?"

"Object? My soul, no! My mother and sister are in it up to their eyebrows, and making a rattling good job of it, too. But when they play the game,

they play it. They leave more trappings than their hats and cloaks downstairs; they let you forget that they are women, and remember that they are human beings."

"I find masculine women—distasteful."

"I never said that they were masculine," O'Hara retorted sharply, "I said that they were first and foremost human beings. Any other attitude is fatal. I tell you that this woman cares nothing in the world for our game; she is playing her own. And she is playing with loaded dice."

"And what game is she playing, pray?"

"The oldest game in the world," said O'Hara. "Antony's dark-eyed Egypt played it, and that slim witch, Mary Stuart, and the milliner's exquisite minx, Du Barry. Only they played behind silken curtains, with little jewelled hands and heads and words. They fight with other weapons nowadays, but the stakes haven't changed since Antony lost a world and won a kiss."

"And the stakes?"

"Why, you are the Stake," said O'Hara. "And I—and Celati there; they are playing for Power—and Man is Power—and Man, poor fool, is their toy. Little Sisters of Circe—they have come out from behind their pale silken curtains and stripped the jewels from the small hands and perfumed

heads and covered their shining shoulders with harsh stuffs and schooled their light tongues to strange words—and we are blind and mad, and call them comrade!"

"*Tiens, tiens!*" murmured De Nemours, "you interest me, O'Hara. I confess that I had failed to find this sinister glamour; but you open pleasant vistas in a parched land!"

O'Hara gave him a wrenched smile. "That was not my endeavour," he said briefly.

Celati rose, a little stiffly. He was a heavy man, and oddly deliberate for a Latin.

"It is late," he said. "Are you coming, De Nemours? Till to-morrow morning, Mr. O'Hara; *a rivederla.*"

"Good-night," returned O'Hara. "At nine-thirty, then. Good-night."

He stood staring down absently at the polished surface of the table for a moment or so after the door had closed, and then crossed to the open window. The stars were shining brightly—but they were very far away and cold, the stars. There was something nearer and sweeter in the quiet room behind him, nearer and sweeter even than on that spring day at Ypres. He turned from the window with a gesture at once violent and weary. Those accursed violets! He could smell them still.

II

"You are taking Lilah Lindsay in to dinner," said Mrs. Dane. "I am kind to you, you see! She's the most exquisite person."

"Exquisite," O'Hara agreed politely, but there was something in his voice that caused Mrs. Dane to raise her beautifully pencilled eyebrows. There was no doubt about it, her distinguished guest was in no transport of enthusiasm as to her adored Lilah. Rumour, for once, was correct! She glanced toward the door, bit her lip, and then, with a swift movement of decision, she turned to the high-backed sofa, her draperies fluttering about her as she seated herself.

"I am so very glad that you came early," she informed him graciously, and O'Hara thought again of her astonishing resemblance to a humming-bird—small and restless and vivid, eternally vibrating over some new flower. "I so rarely get a chance to talk to you—you are most impressively busy, aren't you? Do you see a great deal of Lilah?"

"Mrs. Lindsay has attended all our conferences for the past few weeks."

"Oh, of course, but you can hardly get to know her there, can you?"

"Possibly not. However, I have had to content

myself with that. She is a very busy woman, of course, and my own time is not at my disposal."

"I suppose not," murmured Mrs. Dane mendaciously. She supposed nothing of the sort. "But you are to be pitied, truly. She is a most enchanting person; all the tragedy and cruelty of her life have left her as gay and sweet and friendly as a child. It's incredible."

"She has had tragedy and cruelty in her life?"

"Oh, it's been a nightmare—nothing less. She hadn't been out of her French convent six months when she married that beast, Heaven knows why—she had every other man in Washington at her feet, but he apparently swept her off them! Of course, he had a brilliant future before him——"

"Of course," murmured O'Hara.

"What do you mean? Did you know Curran Lindsay?"

"Never heard of him," O'Hara assured her. "But do go on: what happened to the beast's future?"

She shrugged her white shoulders distastefully. "Oh, he died in a sanitarium in California several years ago, eaten up with drugs and baffled ambition."

"And languishing away without his favourite pastime of beating the lovely Mrs. Lindsay black and blue, I suppose?"

Mrs. Dane controlled a tremor of annoyance. She disliked flippancy and she disliked grimness; combined she found them irritating to a really incredible degree. "Curran never subjected Lilah to physical maltreatment," she said coldly, "he subjected her to something a thousand times more intolerable—his adoration."

"So the beast adored her?"

"He was mad about her. You find that unlikely?"

"On the contrary," replied O'Hara amiably, "I find it inevitable. But what happened to his brilliant career?"

"Oh, he was crazily, insanely jealous—and some devil chose to send him an anonymous letter in the middle of a crucial party contest when his presence was absolutely vital, saying that Lilah was carrying on an affair with an artist in California, where he'd left her for the winter. He went raving made—threw up the whole thing—told his backers that they could go to Hell, he was going to California—and he went, too."

"Ah, Antony, Antony!" O'Hara said softly.

Mrs. Dane stared at him, wide-eyed. "Why, what do you mean? Have you heard the story before?"

"It sounds, somehow, vaguely familiar," he told her. "There was a woman in Egypt—no—

that was an older story than this. Well, what did the beast find?"

"He found Lilah," replied Mrs. Dane sharply. "The artist had promptly blown his brains out when she had sent him about his business, as she naturally did. But Curran's contest was lost, and so was Curran. He might as well have been Benedict Arnold, from his party's point of view. He went absolutely to pieces; took to drinking more and more—then drugs—oh, the whole thing was a nightmare!"

"And the artist blew his brains out, you say?"

"Yes, it was too tragic. Lilah was almost in despair, poor child. He left some dreadful note saying that exiles from Paradise had no other home than Hell—and that one of them was taking the shortest cut to get there. The newspapers got hold of it and gave it the most ghastly publicity, —you see, everyone had prophesied such wonderful things about his future!"

"Still, he had dwelt in Paradise," murmured O'Hara.

"Dwelt? Nonsense—he said that he was an exile!" Mrs. Dane's voice was distinctly sharp, but O'Hara smiled down at her imperturbably.

"Oh, come. It's a little difficult to be exiled from a spot where you've never set foot, isn't it? No, I rather fancy that Mrs. Lindsay found conso-

lation in the dark hours by remembering that she had not always been unkind to the poor exile—that in Paradise for a time there had been moonlight and starlight and sunlight—and that other light that never was, on sea or land. It must have helped her to remember that."

Mrs. Dane dropped her flaming eyes to the fan that shook a little in her jewelled hands. Perhaps it was best to hold the thunder and lightning that she ached to release; after all, it was clearly impossible that he should actually mean the sinister things that he was implying about her incomparable Lilah! It would be an insult to that radiantly serene creature to admit that insult could so much as touch her. She raised defiant eyes to his mocking ones.

"Yes, that's possible; Lilah is divinely kind to any beggar that crosses her path—it isn't in her to hurt a fly, and she must have been gracious to that wretched boy until he made it impossible. But here is Monsieur De Nemours and the lady herself! Let's go into the next room, shall we? Lilah, you lovely wonder, you look sixteen—and young for your age, at that. Let's see, the Havilands aren't here yet, and Bob Hyde telephoned that he and Sylvia would be late——"

O'Hara followed the swift, bird-like voice into the next room. By and by it would stop and he

and Lilah would have to find words to fill the silence. What words should he choose? He was too tired to be careful—too tired to think; what devilish Fate was thrusting him into a position where he must do both?

She was talking to De Nemours, the shining head tilted back a little, the hushed music of her voice drifting across the room to him like a little breeze. She had on a black frock, slim and straight—not a jewel, not a flower, but all of spring laughed and danced and sang and sparkled in that upturned face. O'Hara's hand closed sharply on the back of the chair. What if he were wrong—if this were all some ugly trick that his worn-out nerves were playing? After all, Lucia Dane had known her for years, and women's friendships were notoriously exacting. What did he know of her save that she was lovely? Ah, lovely, lovely to heartbreak, as she stood there laughing up at De Nemours—at once still and sparkling, in that magical way of hers, like sunshine dancing on a quiet pool. Was it some devil in him that made him suspect the angel in her? Sometimes he thought that he must be going mad.

He had been so sure of himself; no woman was to touch his life until he had moulded it into its appointed shape—and then he would find a clear-eyed comrade who would be proud and humble in his

glory—some girl, wise and tender and simple, who would always be waiting, quiet-eyed and quiet-hearted when he turned his tired steps to home—someone in whose kind arms he would find peace and rest and quiet. For he would be Man, the conqueror, and he would have deep need of these. So he had decreed, during the hard years that brought him to this place where, if he stretched only a little higher, he could touch the shining dreams—and behold, a door had opened and closed, and a yellow-haired girl had come in—and his ordered world was chaos and madness. He knew, with a sense of profoundly rebellious despair, that he was out of hand; his nerves had him, and they were riding him unmercifully, revenging themselves richly for all the days and nights that he had crushed them down and scorned them and ignored them. They had him now, this arrogant young dreamer, out to save a world—they had him now, for all his dreams!

"Mr. O'Hara, aren't you taking me in to dinner?"

He started as violently as though she had touched his bare heart with those soft fingers of hers.

"You were a thousand miles away," said the fairy voice, and the hand rested lightly on his arm. "I hate to bring you back, but they're all going in, you see. Was it a pleasant country that you were playing in?"

"Pleasant enough," he told her hardly. "But it's poor sport looking down on a lost inheritance from the edge of a precipice. Did I seem to be enjoying it?"

"You looked as most of us feel on the edge of a precipice, I suppose—a little terrified, and a good deal thrilled. Was the lost heritage a pretty place?"

"As pretty as most lost places," said O'Hara.

Lilah Lindsay leaned toward him, pushing the flowers between them a little aside.

"But why not turn your back on it?" she asked, her eyes laughing into his, friendly and adventurous. "You might climb higher up the mountain, and find some spot so strange and beautiful that it will make the little garden in the valley seem a dull spot well lost."

"I have already turned my back," he said.

"I think that I am glad," said Lilah Lindsay. "You see, you do not belong in the valley. Will you tell me something, Mr. O'Hara?"

"What is there that I can tell you?"

"Oh, many things. I'm not wisdom incarnate, I know, but I have enough wits to realize that stupidity has you fast in his clutch if he can once get you to stop asking questions. I shall go down to my grave with 'Why?' still on my lips, I promise you!"

"Aren't you afraid of exhausting our wretched little hoard of information?"

He felt as though some gigantic hand had released its grasp about his heart. If she would only keep the laughter dancing through her lashes he was safe.

"No, no; it's inexhaustible, if properly handled." Her voice was dancing, too. "I came across an old formula once; it's served me well many and many a time, when I've seen a resentful and suspicious look in some man's eyes that says, 'Young woman, you are leading me to believe that you know more than I do. Young woman, you are boring me.' I can drive that look from any man's eyes in the world!"

"With what alchemy, little magician?"

She leaned closer again, and suddenly he smelt the violets—the room was full of them—the world itself was full of them!

"Why, I ask him to spell a word; any nice, simple word like 'cat' or 'dog,' so that he will be sure to be able to spell it, poor dear! And in thirty seconds the sky is blue, and the birds are singing, and God's in his heaven and woman in her proper place. It's white magic, truly!"

"Truly," O'Hara laughed back at her, "and truly, and truly, I'm believing you." He felt lightheaded with happiness—oh, surely, this was clear

candour that she was giving him; all this lovely nonsense was cool water to his fever. Lucia Dane was right—the rest was ugly madness. "But what was the nice simple word that you were going to ask me to spell?"

"It's rather a long and difficult word, I'm afraid," she said gravely. "I was going to ask how you, an Irishman, came to be the British Representative in our Council?"

For a minute all the old, sick suspicion clouded the gray laughter of his eyes—his face grew hard and still—then the unswerving candour of the eyes lifted to his smote him to the heart, and he smiled down reassuringly.

"I suppose that it does seem damned queer. But you see, I happen to be British first and Irish second. Does that seem impossible?"

"No," she replied slowly, "but it's unusual, isn't it?"

"I suppose so. It's infernally lonely work, I can tell you. You see, I was born and bred in Dublin; all my family think I'm a black traitor. They're hot against England, and hot against me. They won't believe that Ireland is my heart's heart. But England—oh, she's the power and the glory—she can lift the Irish high and safe out of their despair, though it's blind from weeping the poor souls are—they'll never be seeing it."

The Irish in him was burning in his eyes and on his tongue—she stirred and nodded.

"Yes," she said quietly, "I suppose that our Southern men who fought for the Union met with just such hatred and misunderstanding. And yet they were the ones who loved her best, the proud and lovely South—they who were willing to bear her hatred that they might save her soul."

"Oh, it's the wonder you are for understanding!" His heart was shaking his voice, but the callous and greatly bored gentleman on the other side of Mrs. Lindsay suddenly raised an energetic protest.

"See here, Lovely Lady, are you going to leave me to commune with my soul for the rest of the evening? For the last ten minutes I've been trying——"

O'Hara turned to the impatient young woman on his left, the ardour still lingering in his face. It lingered so convincingly that he proceeded to thrill her clear through to her small bones; she spent the next few days in a state of dreamy preoccupation that fairly distracted her adoring husband, and continued to cherish indefinitely the conviction that she had inspired a devastating if hopeless passion. It was lucky for her that she never knew that all that pulled O'Hara through the next ten minutes was a strong effort of the

imagination, by which he substituted a head of palest gold for the curly brown one and a voice of silver magic for some rather shrill chatter. And then, suddenly, it was in blessed truth the silver voice.

"You see, I was specially interested in your feeling for Ireland because of the situation touched on in your record. That's serious, isn't it?"

"Serious to desperation."

"But a great deal of it's just surmise on your part, I suppose?"

"Surmise?" His voice was suddenly weary. "No, no, it's the rotten truth. All the facts are there, even the names of the leaders in the plot."

"But how can you be so sure?"

"I can be sure." There was a grim certainty in his tone that left little room for doubt.

"You use spies?"

"Spies? You might call them that. There are three ring-leaders in the conspiracy; the youngest was my room-mate in college."

"I see." After a moment in which she sat quite still, clear-eyed and pensive, she asked, "Now that you have all the details of the plot, why don't you crush it?"

"To do anything now would precipitate the bloodiest kind of civil war again. We must move with the greatest care; God help Ireland if wind of

it reaches the other party. They're straining at the leash like mad dogs already."

"England must have great faith in your discretion," said Lilah Lindsay, and O'Hara's face suddenly flamed like the Crusader's of old.

"God grant it's not misplaced," he said simply. "It's sleepless I've gone these many nights looking for a way out—and now I think we've found one that's neither too hard nor too weak. It's been weary work hunting it. You see it's not only Ireland we must help; it's all the little, unhappy countries lost in the dark, and like to kill themselves before they find the light. Sometimes it breaks the heart in your body to watch them." His eyes were sombre with all the useless pain in the world.

"Then don't let's watch them for a little while," she said gently. "I should think shame on myself for making you talk shop this way; I do, I do! But it's hard to shake it off, isn't it?"

"Not when you smile like that."

Lilah Lindsay smiled like that again.

"Now and then," she murmured, "you are just about six years old."

"Why did you cut off your hair?" demanded O'Hara, and his voice was a trifle unsteady.

"Why?" She brushed it back with light fingers, gay as a child once more. "Oh, it used to take me

hours to wind it about my head and coil it over my ears; it was way below my waist, you know, and I found it very distracting, to me and—other people. Don't you like it this way?"

"Below your waist," he said. "Oh, then you must be a real Fairy Princess, all shining white and gold."

"But don't you like it this way?" asked Delilah.

"It's beautiful," said O'Hara. "But in every foolish heart of us there's a lady in a tower to whom we call 'Rappunzel, Rappunzel, let down your hair'—waiting to go climbing up the shining locks to her heart—and Paradise."

Delilah rested her chin on linked fingers, her eyes at once dancing and demure. "How lamentably old-fashioned you are for all your radicalism. Shall I let my hair grow?"

"It's the wonder it must be," he whispered. "Breaking and foaming below your waist."

"I've always thought of it, somehow, as a—a symbol," she said, her eyes fixed on the coffee that she was slowly stirring. "When I cut it off, I said to each shining length, 'There you go, Folly—and you, Frailty—and you, Weakness——'"

"And did you never think that your namesake must have cried of old to other shining locks 'There you go, Strength?'"

The new Delilah looked suddenly enchantingly

mischievous. "Well, but that was not her own hair! It belonged to a mere man who chose a very vulnerable spot to keep his strength. You have learned wisdom since Samson."

"I wonder!" said O'Hara.

"I'll remember what you have told me," she laughed up at him. "You seem to hold that woman's strength, too, is in her hair. Perhaps—perhaps you are right, after all. Will you come to see me one of these days, and try to convert me?"

They were all standing; he rose, too, his eyes holding her.

"When may I come—to-morrow?"

She smiled back at his swift urgency—then bent the primrose head in assent. O'Hara held back the curtains for her to pass through.

"To-morrow," he told her, his eyes still lit with that incredulous wonder. "To-morrow is a great way off!"

III

"I'll just wait here," he said to the pretty maid. "I'm not dressed for a party. You might tell Mrs. Lindsay that—that when she's not too busy, I'd like awfully to speak to her for a minute."

"Very well, Mr. O'Hara." Her voice had all the impersonal blankness of the well-trained servant, but once on the dark stairs she shook her

glossy head dismally. She had come to know him well in the past weeks.

"The Saints preserve the poor man, it's fit for a long rest in a pine box he's looking, and that's no lie at all! And it's my fine lady upstairs that is after painting shadows black as the pit under his poor eyes, or my name's not Bridget O'Neill. It's a wicked world entirely, and that's what it is!"

O'Hara stood watching the door through which she had vanished. In a minute—in five minutes—in ten minutes—someone else might stand framed in that door; he could not tear his eyes from it, but stood staring, hands thrust deep into his pockets, very quiet, with fever playing behind the tense stillness of his face. The painted clock on the mantel chimed the hour out twelve times, each stroke a mocking peal of laughter. His shoulders sagged abruptly and he turned from the door. What was the use?—she wasn't coming. She would never come again.

He crossed to the mantel slowly, noting all the studied grace with desperate tenderness. To whom could it belong but Lilah, the little room that he loved, demure and gay—intimate as a boudoir, formal as a study? Those slim hands of hers must have placed the bright flowers in the low bowls of powdered Venetian glass, and lined the bookcases with deep-coloured books, set the small

bright fire burning with pine cones, and lighted the waxen candles that were casting their gracious light all about him. The satin-wood desk looked austere enough, with its orderly stacks of paper, its trays of sharpened pencils and shining pens—but the lace pillow in the deep chair by the fire was a little crumpled, there was a half-burnt cigarette in the enamelled tray, and trailing its rosy grace shamelessly across a sombre cushion was a bit of chiffon and ribbon, the needle still sticking in it. It could not have been so long ago that she had been here; all the dainty disorder spoke eloquently of her still.

Oh, thrice-accursed fool that he had been to risk even for a second the happiness that for weeks had been fluttering closer to him—the happiness that only a day before had almost closed its shining wings about him! They had been looking at some of her old snapshots of a motor trip through Ireland, laughing together in the enchanted intimacy which they had acquired over the begoggled, beveiled, and beswaddled small creature that she assured him was her exquisite self—and then she had come upon a snapshot that was only too obviously not Ireland. It was of a vine-hung terrace, with the sea stretching far out in the distance, and the sunlight dappling through onto the upturned face of a man—quite a young man, in

white flannels, swinging a careless tennis racquet and laughing in the sun. For a minute her sure fingers had faltered; there, very deliberately, she had picked it up, tearing it into small pieces, dropping them deftly into the dancing fire.

"Here's one of us having tea by the road," she had continued evenly, but O'Hara had not even heard her. His mind was far away, sick with apprehension and suspicion, all the old dim terrors suddenly rampant.

"Lilah—it's unspeakable of me to worry you with this—but I can't get it out of my mind somehow. Will you tell me—will you tell me if they ever found out who sent that anonymous letter to your husband?"

She had stared back at him with strange eyes set in a face from which every trace of emotion had suddenly been frozen.

"The letter? No." The small remote voice was utterly forbidding. "You are quite right; it is cruel to remind of those times. What difference can it possibly make to you?"

He had fought desperately to find some words that would show her what need his sick soul had of assurance, but he had found none. He could only stare at her dumbly, his wretched eyes assuring that it made, somehow, a huge difference.

"But why?"

And he had cried hopelessly, "Oh, I may be mad—I think I am—but I can't get it out of my head. I keep wondering whether you—if you sent——"

"I?" She had cried out as sharply as though he had struck her, and then sat very still, fighting her way back to composure, inch by inch. When she spoke again her voice was very low, incredibly controlled.

"You are implying something that is too monstrous for sanity. May I ask what motive—what possible motive, however abominable—you think that I could have had for wrecking my husband's career?"

He had whispered, "Oh, God forgive me, what motive had Antony's Egypt? What motive have any of you for flaunting your power over us? You crack the whip, and we go crashing through the hoop of our dreams, smashing it—smashing it for ever."

She had risen then, sweeping him from brow to heel with her unrelenting eyes.

"How you know us!" His heart had sickened under that terrible small laugh, cold as frozen water. And she had turned to the door, her head high. "If you can think such things of me—if you can even dream them—your presence here is simply an insult to us both. I must ask you to leave. And unless you realize the grotesque madness of

your accusation, I must ask you not to come here again. That releases you from dinner to-morrow night, naturally. I don't think that there is anything more to be said."

No, there had been nothing more to be said—nothing. He could not remember how he had got himself out of the house—he could not remember anything save a dull nightmare of vacillation and despair, that had finally driven him back to the little room, whipped and beaten, ready to capitulate on any terms—ready for any life that would buy him a moment's happiness. And now—now she would not come, even to accept his surrender. He turned from the mantel violently, and felt his heart contract in swift panic. A man was watching him intently from the other end of the room—a man with a hateful, twisted face—he caught his breath in a shaken laugh. Those damned nerves of his would wreck him yet! It was only his reflection in the cloudy Venetian mirror; the firelight and candlelight played strange tricks with it, shadowing it grotesquely—still, even looked at closely, it was nothing to boast of. He stood contemplating it grimly with its tortured mouth and haunted eyes—and then suddenly the air was full of violets. He turned slowly, a strange peace holding his tired heart. She had come to him; nothing else would ever matter again.

She was standing in the doorway, a little cloud of palest gray. It was the first time that he had seen her in light colours, and she had done something to her hair—caught it up with a great sparkling comb—it shone like pale fire. Her arms were quite full of violets—the largest ones that he had ever seen, like purple pansies. He stood drinking her in with his tired eyes, not even looking for words. It was she who spoke.

"Bridget told me that you were here. I thought that you were not coming to-night."

He shook his head, with a torn and lamentable smile. "You said—until I realized my madness. Believe me—believe me, I have realized it, Lilah."

She came slowly into the room, but the nearer she came to him the farther she seemed away, secure in her ethereal loveliness, her velvet eyes turned to ice.

"You have realized it, I am afraid, too late. There are still two tables of bridge upstairs; I have only a few minutes to give you. Was there anything that you wished to say?"

He shook his head dumbly, and she sank into the great chair, stifling a small yawn perfunctorily.

"Oh, I'm deathly tired. It's been a hideous evening, from beginning to end. Come, amuse me, good tragedian, make me laugh just once, and I

may forgive you. I may forgive you, even though you do not desire it." Again that fleeting smile, exquisite and terrible.

But O'Hara was on his knees beside her.

"Delilah, don't laugh, don't laugh—I'm telling you the laughter is dead in me. I'd rather see you weeping for the poor, blind fool who lost the key to Paradise."

"Who threw it away," she amended, touching the violets with light fingers. "But never forget, it's better not to have set your foot within its gates than to be exiled from it. Never forget that, my tragedian."

He raised his head, haggard and alert. "Lilah, what do you mean?"

"Why, nothing—only Lucia Dane was here for dinner and she thought it—strange—that you and I should be the gossip of Washington these days. When she had finished with what you had said to her, I thought it strange, too. And I assured her that there would be no more cause for gossip."

"I was mad when I talked to that little fool," he told her fiercely. "Clean out of my head trying to fight off your magic. That was the first night—the first night that I owned to myself that I loved you."

"Your madness seems to be recurrent," she

murmured. "You should take measures against it."

"I have taken measures. It shall never touch you again. I know now that it has simply been an obsession—a hallucination—anything in Heaven or Hell that you want to call it. You have all my trust, all my faith."

"It is a terrible thing not to trust a woman," she said. "More terrible than you know. Sometimes it makes her unworthy of trust."

"Not you," he whispered. "Never."

"We're delicate machinery, tragedian. Touch a hidden spring in us with your clumsy fingers and the little thing that was ticking away as faithfully and peacefully as an alarm-clock stops for a minute—and then goes on ticking. Only it has turned to an infernal machine—and it will destroy you."

She was silent for a moment, her fingers resting lightly on that bowed head. When she spoke again her voice was gentle. "Last night, after you had gone, I remembered what you had said about Antony and his Egypt, and I found the play. Parts of it still go singing through my head. They loved each other so, those two magnificent fools. He finds her treacherous a hundred times, and each time forgives her, and loves her again—and she repays him beyond belief—far, far beyond

power and treachery and death. Do you remember his cry in that first hour of his disaster?

"'O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt?'

"And when she weeps for pardon, how he tells her

"'Fall not a tear, I say: one of them rates
All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss,
Even this repays me.'

"Though she has ruined him utterly—though he sees it and cries aloud

"'O this false soul of Egypt! this grave charm,—
Whose eye becked forth my wars, and called them home,
Like a right gipsy hath at false and loose
Beguiled me to the very heart of loss.'

"Still, still his last thought is to reach her arms.

'I am dying, Egypt, dying, only
I here importune death awhile, until
Of many thousand kisses the poor last
I lay upon thy lips.'"

"Why, he was well repaid," said that strange, humble voice.

"I am glad that you feel that," Delilah told him, and she rose swiftly. "Would you like to kiss me? You see, I have ruined you."

O'Hara stumbled to his feet.

"What are you saying?" he whispered, a dreadful incredulity driving the words through his stiffened lips.

"That I have ruined you. I have sent your notes on the Irish situation to the other party."

"You are mad."

"No, no." She shook her head reassuringly. "Quite sane. I didn't address them in my own handwriting, naturally. The envelope is typewritten, but the notes are in long-hand; yours. The English Government will be forced to believe that for once it has misplaced its trust—but Ireland should pay you well—if she lives through civil war."

"By God——" His voice failed him for a moment. "This is some filthy dream."

"No dream, believe me." She came closer to him, radiant and serene. "Did you think that I was a yellow-headed doll, that you could insult me beyond belief, mock me to my friends, slander me to the Committee of which I was a member? Monsieur De Nemours was good enough to warn me against you, also. I am no doll, you see; I happen to be a woman. We have not yet mastered that curiously devised code that you are pleased to term Honour—a code which permits you to betray a woman but not a secret—to cheat a man out of millions in business but not out of a cent at cards. It's a little artificial, and we're ridiculously primitive. We use lynch-law still; swift justice with the nearest weapon at hand."

O'Hara was shaking like a man in a chill, his voice hardly above a whisper. "What have you done? What have you done, Delilah?"

"Don't you understand?" She spoke with pretty patience, as though to some backward child. "I have ruined you—you and your Ireland, too. I sent——"

And suddenly, shaken and breathless, she was in his arms.

"Oh, Ireland—Ireland and I!" But even at that strange cry she never stirred. "It's you—you who are ruined, my Magic—and it's I who have done it, driving you to this ugly madness." He held her as though he would never let her go, sheltering the bowed golden head with his hand. "Though I forgive you a thousand thousand times, how will you forgive yourself, my little Love? You who would not hurt a flower, where will you turn when you see what you have done?"

He could feel her tears on his hand; she was weeping piteously, like a terrified child.

"Oh, you do love me, you do love me! I was so frightened—I thought that you would never love me."

He held her closer, infinitely careful of that shining fragility.

"I love nothing else."

"Not Ireland?"

He closed his hunted eyes, shutting out Memory.

"I hated Ireland," wept the small voice fiercely, "because you loved her so."

"Hush, hush, my Heart."

"But you do—you do love me best?"

"God forgive me, will you make me say so?"

There was a moment's silence, then something brushed his hand, light as a flower, and Delilah raised her head.

"No, no, wait." She was laughing, tremulous and exquisite. "Did you think—did you think that I had really sent your notes?"

O'Hara felt madness touching him; he stared down at her, voiceless.

"But of course, of course, I never sent them. They are upstairs; wait, I'll get them for you—wait!"

She slipped from his arms and was half way to the door before his voice arrested her.

"Lilah!"

"Yes?"

"You say—that you have not sent the notes?"

"Darling idiot, how could you have thought that I would send them? This is Life, not melodrama!"

"You never—you never thought of sending them?"

"Never, never." Her laughter rippled about him. "I wanted to see——"

But he was groping for the mantel, sick and dizzy now that there was no need of courage. Delilah was at his side in a flash, her arms about him.

"Oh, my dear!" He had found the chair but she still clung to him. "What is it? You're ill—you're ill!"

Someone was coming down the stairs; she straightened to rigidity, and was at the door in a flash.

"Captain Lawrence!"

The young Englishman halted abruptly—wheeled.

"Captain Lawrence, Mr. O'Hara is here; he had to see me about some papers, and he has been taken ill. He's been overworking hideously lately. Will you get me some brandy for him?"

"Oh, I say, what rotten luck!" He lingered, concern touching his pleasant boyish face. "Where do I get the brandy, Mrs. Lindsay?"

"Ask Lucia Dane, she knows how to get hold of the maids. And hurry, will you?"

She was back at his side before the words had left; he could feel her fingers brushing his face like frightened butterflies, but he did not open his eyes. He was too mortally tired to lift his lids.

"Here you are, Mrs. Lindsay. Try this, old son. Steady does it."

He swallowed, choked, felt the warm fire sweep through him, tried to smile, tried to rise.

"No, no, don't move—don't let him move, Captain Lawrence."

"You stay where you are for a bit, young feller, my lad. Awfully sorry that I have to run, Mrs. Lindsay, but they telephoned for me from the Embassy. Some excitement about Turkey, the devil swallow them all. Good-night—take it easy, O'Hara!"

"Oh, Captain Lawrence!" He turned again. "Have you the letter that I asked you to mail?"

"Surely, right here. I'll post it on my way over."

"Thanks a lot, but I've decided not to send it, after all." She stretched out her hand, smiling. "It's an article on women in public life, and it's going to need quite a few changes under the circumstances."

"The circumstances?"

"Yes. You might tell them at the Embassy—if they're interested. I'm handing in my resignation on the International Committee to-morrow."

O'Hara gripped the arm of his chair until he felt it crack beneath his fingers. Captain Lawrence was staring at her in undisguised amazement.

"But I say! How in the world will they get along without you?"

"Oh, they'll get along admirably." She dismissed it as easily as though it were a luncheon engagement. "That young Lyons is the very man they need; he's really brilliant and a perfect encyclopædia of information. I'll see you at the Embassy on Friday, won't I? Good-night."

Her arms were about O'Hara before the hall door slammed.

"You're better now? All right? Oh, you frightened me so! It wasn't that foolish trick of mine that hurt you? Say no, say no—I couldn't ever hurt you!"

"Never. I should be whipped for frightening you." His arms were fast about her, but his eyes were straying. What had she done with that letter? He had caught a glimpse of it, quite a bulky letter, in a large envelope, with a typewritten address—typewritten.

"Have you noticed my hair?" The magic voice was touched with gayety again, and O'Hara brushed the silken mist with his lips, his eyes still seeking. "I remembered what you said, you see; it grows most awfully fast—one of these days it will be as long as Rappunzel's or Melisande's. Will you like it then?"

Ah, there it was, face down on the lacquer table. He drew a deep breath.

"Lilah, that letter—what did you say was in that letter?"

There was a sudden stillness in the room; he could hear the painted clock ticking clearly. Then she spoke quietly:

"It's an article that I have written on women in public life. Didn't you hear me telling Captain Lawrence?"

"Will you let me see it?"

Again that stillness; then, very gently, Delilah pushed away his arms and rose.

"No," she said.

"You will not?"

"No." The low voice was inflexible. "I know what you are thinking. You are thinking that those are the Irish notes; that I had fully intended to send them this evening; that it was only an impulse of mine that saved you, as it would have been an impulse that wrecked you. You are thinking that next time it may fall differently. And you are willing to believe me guilty until I am proved innocent. You have always been that—always."

He bowed his head.

"I could hand you that envelope and prove that I am entirely innocent, but I'll not purchase your confidence. It should be a gift—oh, it should be more. It is a debt that you owe me. Are you going to pay it?"

O'Hara raised haggard eyes to hers.

"How should I pay it?"

"If you insist on seeing this, I will show it to you; but I swear to you that I will never permit you to enter this house again; I swear it. Do you believe me?"

"Yes."

"If you will trust me, I will give you your notes, love you for the rest of my life—marry you to-morrow." She went to the table, picked up the envelope, and stood waiting. "What shall I do?"

He rose unsteadily, catching at the mantel. No use—he was beaten.

"Will you get me the notes?"

He saw her shake then, violently, from head to foot, but her eyes never wavered. She nodded, and was gone.

He stood leaning against the mantel, his dark head buried in his arms. Beaten! He would never know what was in that envelope—never, never. She could talk to all Eternity about faith and trust; he would go wondering all his life through. If he had stood his ground—if he had claimed the envelope and she had been proven innocent, he would have lost her but he would have found his faith. He had sold his soul to purchase her body. The painted clock struck once, and he raised his head——

No, no, he was mad. She was right—entirely, absolutely right—she was just and merciful, she who might have scourged him from her sight for ever. What reason in heaven or earth had he to distrust her? Because her voice was silver and her hair was gold? Because violets scattered their fragrance when she stirred? Oh, his folly was thrice damned. If he had a thousand proofs against her, he should still trust her. What was it that that chap Browning said?

> "What so false as truth is
> False to thee?"

That was what love should be—not this sick and faltering thing——

"Here are the notes," said Delilah's voice at his shoulder, and her eyes added, wistful and submissive: "And here am I."

O'Hara took them in silence, his fingers folding them mechanically, measuring, weighing, appraising. The envelope could have held them easily——

She turned from him with a little cry.

"Oh, you are cruel, cruel!"

He stood staring at her for a moment—at the small, desolate figure with its bowed head, one arm flung across her eyes like a stricken child—and suddenly his heart melted within him. She was

weeping, and he had made her weep. He took a swift step toward her, and halted. In the mirror at the far end of the room he could see her, dimly caught between firelight and candlelight, shadowy and lovely—in the mirror at the far end of the room she was smiling, mischievous and tragic and triumphant. He stared incredulously—and then swept her to him despairingly, burying his treacherous eyes in the bright hair in which clustered the invisible violets.

HER GRACE

THE first time that the Black Duke saw her she was laughing—and the last time that he saw her she was laughing, too.

He and a ruddy-faced companion had fared forth doggedly into the long summer twilight in quest of some amusement to dispel the memory of the extravagantly gloomy little dinner that they had shared at the club, followed by a painful hour over admirable port and still more admirable cigars. It was August, and London was empty as a drum of the pretty faces and pretty hats and pretty voices that made it tolerable at times—it was as dry and dusty as life itself, and John Saint Michael Beauclerc, ninth Duke of Bolingham, tramping along the dull street beside a dull comrade, thought to himself with a sudden alien passion that youth was a poor thing to look back on, and age an ugly thing to look forward to, and middle age worse than either. He scowled down magnificently from his great height at the once-gregarious Banford, whose flushed countenance bore the consternation of one who has made a bad

bargain and sees no way out of it—no duke lived who was worth such an evening, said Gaddy Banford's hunted eyes. This particular duke eyed him sardonically.

"Close on to nine," he said. "Well, then, what time does this holy paragon do her turn?"

"About nine," replied his unhappy host. "But, I say, you know, I don't want to drag you around if you'd rather not. She's frightfully good in her line, but if dancing bores you——"

"You're dashed considerate all at once," remarked his guest. "If I haven't cracked by now, I fancy I'll live through the best dancing of the century. That's what you called it, wasn't it? Here, you!"

He waved an imperious hand at a forlorn hansom clattering down the silent street, and it jolted to a halt under one of the gas lamps. For it was not in this century that the Duke of Bolingham met Miss Biddy O'Rourke. No, it was in a century when hansom cabs and gas lamps were commonplaces—when ladies wore bonnets like butterflies on piled-up ringlets, and waltzed for hours in satin slippers and kid gloves two sizes too small for them—when gentlemen cursed eloquently but noiselessly because maidens whisked yards of tulle and tarlatan behind them when they danced—a century of faded flowers and fresh sentiments and

enormous sleeves—of conservatories and cotillions and conventions—of long, long letters and little perfumed notes—of intrigues over tea tables, and coaching parties to the races, and Parma violets, and pretty manners, and broken hearts. A thousand years ago, you might think, but after all it was only around the corner of the last century that the Duke of Bolingham stepped into the decrepit hansom closely followed by his unwilling retainer, and in no uncertain tones bade the driver proceed to the Liberty Music Hall.

He sat cloaked in silence while they drove, his heavy shoulders hunched up, his eyes half closed, brooding like a despoiled monarch and a cheated child over the sorry trick that life had played him. He had had everything—and he had found nothing worth having. He had the greatest fortune in England—and one of the greatest names. He had Beaton House, the Georgian miracle that was all London's pride—and Gray Courts, that dream of sombre beauty, that was all England's pride—Gray Courts that even now held his three tall, black-browed sons who could shoot and hunt and swear as well as any in the country—yes, even fourteen-year Roddy. That held, too, a collection of Spanish and Portuguese armour second to none, and a collection of Van Dykes first of any, and the finest clipped yew hedge in a thousand miles.

That held the ladies Pamela, Clarissa, Maud, and Charlotte, his good sisters, too acidulous to find a husband between them, for all their great dowers and name and accomplishments. That for six long years had held the Lady Alicia Honoria Fortescue, a poor, sad, dull little creature, married in a moment of pity and illusion when they were both young enough to know better, who had gone in mortal terror of him from the night that they crossed the threshold of the Damask Room to the day that they laid her away under the kind marble in the little chapel.

He sat huddled in the corner of the hansom, remembering with the same shock of sick amazement his despair at the discovery of her fear of him; it still haunted every tapestried corridor of Gray Courts—every panelled hall in Beaton House—he set his teeth and turned his head, and swore that he would take the next boat to France and drink himself to death in Cannes. And the hansom cab stopped.

Gaddy Banford had two seats in the first row of stalls; had 'em for every night that the lady danced, he informed the duke with chastened pride. The duke, trampling over the outraged spectators with more than royal indifference, eyed him grimly.

"Spend the rest of your valuable time hanging round the stage door, what?" he inquired audibly.

Five of the outraged spectators said "Sh-s-h," and the duke, squaring about in his seat, favoured them with so black a glance that the admonitions died on their lips and apologies gathered in their eyes. Banford smiled nervously and ingratiatingly.

"Oh, rather not—no, no, nothing of that kind whatever. She doesn't go in for stage-door meetings, you know. I've had the honour of meeting the lady twice and she's most frightfully jolly and all that, but——"

"Sh-h-h," enjoined one rebellious spirit, studiously avoiding the duke's eye. That gentleman remarked "Ha!" with derisive inflection and turned a contemptuous eye on the stage. A very large and apparently intoxicated mouse was chasing a small and agitated cat with rhythmic zest, the two having concluded the more technical portion of their programme, in which they had ably defended against all comers their engaging title of the "Jolly Joralomons, Europe, Asia, Africa, and America's Most Unique and Mirth Compelling Acrobats, Tumblers, and Jugglers." The Jolly Joralomons scampered light-heartedly off, rolling their equipment of bright balls before them with dexterous paws, and capered back even more light-heartedly to blow grateful kisses off the tips of their whiskers to an enraptured audience, with which the Duke of Bolingham was all too obviously not in accord.

"Gad!" he remarked with appalled conviction. "Death's too good for them! Here, let's get out of this while I've got strength——"

Banford lifted a pleading hand. There was a warning roll of drums, a preliminary lilt of violins, and the orchestra swung triumphantly into the "Biddy Waltz"—the waltz that all London had revolved to for three good months. The house sighed like a delighted child, and far up in the gallery an ecstatic voice called "Ah, there, lassie!" And another echoed "Come ahn, Biddy—Alf and me's 'ere!"

And onto a stage that was black as night, with one great bound as though she had leapt through infinite space from a falling star into the small safe circle of the spotlight, came Biddy O'Rourke, straight on the tips of her silver toes, with laughter for a dark world in both her outstretched hands—and the piece of the world that faced her rose to its feet and shouted a welcome. All but one.

The Black Duke of Bolingham sat square in the centre in the first row of seats in the Liberty Music Hall as still as though he had been struck down by lightning, with the "Biddy Waltz" rising and falling about him unheeded, his eyes fixed incredulously on the Vision in the spotlight. The Vision had already fixed the eyes and turned the heads and broken the hearts of half the masculine popu-

lation of London (the other half not having seen her!) but nothing that the duke had heard had prepared him for this.

Who could have told him that a music hall dancer called Biddy O'Rourke, late of Dublin, no taller than a child and seventeen years old to the day, could look like a fairy and an angel and an imp and a witch and a dream? Not Gaddy Banford, of a certainty—not Gaddy, who, in a burst of lyric enthusiasm, had confided to his duke that she was little and blonde and light on her feet. "Little"—you who were more fantastically minute than any elf, Biddy! Blonde—oh, sacrilege, to dismiss thus that foam and froth of curls cresting and bubbling about your gay head like champagne, with the same pure glitter of pale gold—that skin of pearl beneath which danced little flames of rose fire—those eyes, bluer than anything on earth—blue as the skies and seas and flowers that haunt our dreams. Light on your feet—oh, Biddy, you, who soared and floated and drifted like a feather in the wind, like a butterfly gone mad—like a flying leaf and a dancing star! Had he said that you had a nose tilted as a flower petal, and a mouth that tilted, too? Had he said that when you blew across the dark stage that you would be arrayed in silver brighter than foam and white more airy than clouds? Had he said that you would dance not

only with those miraculous toes but with your curls and with your lashes and with your lips and with your heart? Had he said that you would come laughing, little Biddy?

High on the tips of those incredible toes she came—nearer and nearer, so swift and light and sure that it seemed to Bolingham's dazzled eyes that it would take less than a breath to blow her over that barrier of light straight into his arms—straight into his heart—into his tired and lonely heart. He leaned forward, and the vision of gold and silver stared back at him, faltered, tilted forward on her toes, and flung down to him the airy music of her mirth.

"Oh, I couldn't any more dance with you looking like that than I could grow feathers!" cried the Vision. "No, not if Saint Patrick himself were to bid me. Whatever in the whole world's the matter?"

The audience stopped howling its delirious approval at their Biddy's appearance in order to revel in their Biddy's chaff. No one could chaff like Biddy—no one nearer than Cork, at any rate. It was better than seeing her dance to listen to her laugh, gentle as a lamb, and pert as a monkey, and gay as a Bank Holiday. Free as air, too; if any of those Johnnies in the stalls tried any of their nonsense, it was a fair treat to hear her give 'em what

for! The audience stood on tiptoes and shoved and elbowed in riotous good humour in their efforts to locate her latest victim—that great black fellow with shoulders like a prize-fighter, likely. The great black fellow promptly gratified their fondest expectations by falling into the silver net of Biddy's laughter and answering her back.

"Thanks," he replied distinctly. "Nothing in the whole world's the matter—now."

"Whatever were you thinkin' to make you scowl the big black ogre himself then?"

And the Black Duke replied as clearly as though he were addressing the lady in the hush of the rose garden at Gray Courts instead of in the presence of the largest and most hilarious audience in London.

"I was wondering how in God's name I was going to get to you quickly enough to tell you what I was thinking before I burst with it."

The transfixed Gaddy tottered where he stood, and the audience howled unqualified approval, even while they waited for her to pin him to the wall with her reply. But Biddy only came a step nearer, staring down at him with the strangest look of wonder and delight and enchanted mischief.

"Oh, whatever must you think of me, not knowing you at all?" she cried to him over the muted

lilt of her waltz. "'Twas the lights in my eyes, maybe—or maybe the lights in yours. It's the foolish creature I am anyway you put it. Would you be waiting for ten minutes?"

"No," said His Grace firmly.

"Seven?"

"It'll kill me," said His Grace. "Where will you be?"

"There's a wee door over beyond the red curtain," said Biddy. "You go through that, and you're in an alley as black as a pit, and you take three steps—no, with the legs you have you can do it in two with no trouble at all—and there'll be another door with a fine big light over it, and I'll be under the light. Don't die."

"No," said His Grace. "I won't."

"Play it faster than that," Biddy cried to her stupefied musicians, once more poised high on her silver toes. "Ah, it's the poor, slow, thumb-fingered creatures you are, the lot of you! Play it fast as my Aunt Dasheen's spotted kitten chasin' its tail or I'll dance holes in your drums for you—weren't you after hearin' that I have five minutes to do three great dances? It's black-hearted fiends you are, with your dawdlin' and your dith-erin'. Ah, darlin's, come on now—spin it faster than that for the poor dyin' gentleman and the girl that's goin' to save him!"

And with a flash and a dip and a swirl she was off, and the Black Duke was off, too. Gaddy Banford put up a feeble clamour as his guest swept by him toward the aisle.

"Oh, but my dear fellow—no, but I say, wait a bit—she's simply chaffing you, you know; she'll never in the world be there for a minute——"

"Hand over my stick, will you?" inquired the duke affably. "You've no earthly use for two. And don't come trotting along after me, either. She's not expecting *you*, you know—rather not." He swung buoyantly off toward the red curtain, bestowing a benign nod on the now deliriously diverted audience.

"Take a chair along, matey!" "Want a mornin' paper? Come in 'andy to pass away the time!" "Fetch 'im 'is tea at nine, Bertie—'e'll need it bad." "Don't you wait for her no more than twenty-four hours, ole dear—promise us that, now——"

"Bolingham, I say——" panted the unfortunate Gaddy. "I say, someone must have tipped her off, you know!"

"Tipped her off?"

"Told her who you were, you know?"

The duke laughed aloud and Gaddy Banford, who had never heard him do this, jumped badly.

"D'you know what I've been wondering,

Gaddy? I've been wondering how the deuce I was going to own up to her—a duke's such a damn potty thing, when you come down to it. Why the devil didn't someone make me Emperor of Russia?"

He brushed aside the red curtain, grinned once more into Banford's stunned countenance, and passed with one great stride through the door into the black alley. The door swung to behind him, and he stood leaning against it for a minute, savouring the wonder and the magic that he had fallen heir to. There was a drift of music in the alley—the sky was powdered thick with stars—the air was sweet as flowers against his face. He drew a deep breath, and turned his head; and there she stood beneath the light, with a black scarf over her golden head and a black cloak over her silver dress—and it took him two strides to reach her, as she had said. She had one hand to her heart and was breathing quickly in little light gasps, as though she had come running.

"Were you waitin' long?" she asked. "I never stopped at all to change a stitch and dear knows 'twas a sin how I cheated on that last one—no more than a flout and a spin, and not that maybe; only I was afraid for my soul you'd be gone. Was it long you waited?"

"Forty-two years," said His Grace. "Forty-two years and three days."

He watched the rose flood up to her lashes at that, but the joyous eyes never swerved from his.

"Ah, well," she murmured, "I waited seventeen my own self, and I not half the size of you—no higher than your pocket, if you come to look. I can't think at all what you've been doing with yourself all that time."

"Don't think—ever," he said. "I've done nothing worth a moment's thought but miss you."

"Have you missed me then, truly?" she whispered. "Oh, it's from farther than Cork I'd come to hear you say that; I'd come from Heaven itself, may the Saints there forgive me. Say it again, quick!"

"I've missed you since the day I drew breath," he told her, and his voice shook. "Every day that I've lived has been black and bare and cold without you—blackest because I never knew I'd find you. Biddy, is it true? Things don't happen like this, do they? No one out of a dream ever had such hair—no one out of a fairy tale such eyes! Biddy, would you laugh like that if it were a dream?"

"I would that," she remarked with decision. "It's a fine dream and a grand fairy tale and the truest truth you ever heard in your life. I knew 'twas you even when you were scowlin', but those

lights were in my eyes, so I couldn't be sure till you smiled."

"Biddy, how did you know?"

She pushed the scarf back from those golden bubbles with a gay gesture of impatience.

"Well, why wouldn't I know? That's a queer way to talk to a bright girl! Didn't my own Aunt Dasheen, she that was all the family I had till I ran off and took London for one, tell me that I'd be the grandest dancer that ever leapt, and marry the finest gentleman that ever walked, as big as a giant and black as a devil and handsome as a king? And she ought to know, surely, what with reading in tea and clear water as quick as you and me in the Good Book. It was the wicked, cunning old thing she was, God rest her soul."

"Is she dead?"

"She is that," replied Aunt Dasheen's niece cheerfully. "Or I'd never be here to tell it. She kept tight hold of me as if I were a bit of gold, for all that she sorrowed and sang how I was more trouble to her than any monkey from Egypt. If Tim Murphy and his brothers hadn't been coming to show the Londoners how to juggle glass balls and brought me along to hold the things, I'd be in the wee room tending the fire and the kitten this minute, instead of standing under a light in a silver dress with my heart in my hands."

"I wish I could thank her," said the duke.

"It's little enough you have to thank her for," replied his Biddy blithely. "She was crosser than most and cooler than any, God help her. 'Twas that spotted kitten she loved; if she hadn't seen the bit about me in the tea, she'd have dropped me straight out of the window. But there was my grand gentleman and the rest of it to give her patience. 'Wed at seventeen, dead at——'" She caught back the words as deftly as Tim Murphy's glass balls, with a triumphant shake of her curls. "'Death to your dancing,' she'd keep saying. You could thank her for that, maybe—or perhaps 'twas because I danced you stopped scowling, and you'll not want me to leave off?"

"Biddy, it's true then—you're only seventeen?" His voice was touched with a strange pain and wonder.

"Hear him, now—only, indeed! I'm seventeen the day."

"And I past forty-two!"

"Are you no more than that?" she asked softly. "However in all the world could you get so great and grand and fine in that little while?"

"Oh," he cried. "Does laughter take the sting from all that's ugly? Laugh again then; there's worse still. Lord help us, darling—I'm a duke!"

"Is that all?" she inquired regretfully. "I'd

have thought a king at the least. Well, come, there's no helping it—'tis not all of us get our deserts in this wicked world."

"Biddy," he begged. "Laugh at this, too, will you? Try, try, dear, before it hurts us. I have three sons, Biddy. I've been married before."

She put her other hand to her heart at that, but she kept her lips curved.

"It's small wonder," she said. "Why wouldn't you have been? I'm the shameless one to say it, but if I'd been ten girls instead of one, it's ten times you'd have been married."

He put his arms about her then, and something broke in his heart—something cold and hard and bitter. He wanted to tell her that, but he could find no words, because he was only a duke, and not a very articulate one at that. But the small shining creature in his arms had words enough for two.

"Were you thinking of wedding again, maybe?"

"Oh, Biddy," he cried, "let's hurry!"

"If you're asking *me*," she said, "I'd say we were hurrying fast and free. I can hear the air whistlin' in my ears, I can that. Was she a fine lady, darling?"

"Who?" he asked—and remembered—and forgot her for all time. "Oh, she was a very fine lady, and good, and gentle, too. She died long ago."

"Did she, poor thing?" whispered the future Duchess of Bolingham softly, the cloud in the blue, blue eyes gone for ever. "And me no good at all. I wonder at you! Are they little young things, your sons?"

"The smallest's big enough to put you in his pocket," he said. "Biddy, let's hurry. I know an Archbishop that we could have fix it to-night—I know two, if it comes to that. One of 'em was my godfather."

"Well, you could know six, and 'twould be all the good it would do you," commented his Biddy serenely. "I know one old priest, and his name's Father Leary, and 'twill be a bitter grief to him, but he may do it, since he's one of the Saints themselves and terrible fond of a bad girl. Archbishop, indeed!"

"Let's find him, then, and tell him. I'll——"

"We'll not, then. He's a poor old man that needs his sleep, and we're two mad things that should know better. See the stars, darlin'; they're the cool little things. We must do nothing in haste, except leave this door, maybe. The whole lot of them will be out on us like a lot of ravening wolves any minute. Wherever can we go?"

"We can go and get married," said the Duke of Bolingham, who was a simple and determined individual. "I'll get——"

"You might get a hansom——" Biddy danced in rapture on the tips of her toes. "You might get that one there, and we could ride a hundred miles or so, and watch how cool the stars are. I never was long enough in one in my life to get over feeling sad that soon it would stop, an' I'd have to be off and out. Would you get one—would you?"

The duke raised his hand to the hansom, and it crawled toward them dubiously. The small dancing creature on the pavement looked frankly incredible, both to the horse and the driver, but the large black one looked as though it knew its mind. The two of them got in quickly, and the small one tilted back her shining head against the great one's shoulder, sighing rapturously, while the black cloak fell open, and her skirts frothed about her in a manner scandalous to behold.

"Where to?" inquired the cabby with severity.

"Oh, what matter at all where to?" cried the incredible small one. "A hundred miles or so any way at all, just so we can see those stars go out; they're that cool and calm it's an aggravation."

"Drive straight ahead—a hundred miles," said the great one in so terrifying a tone that the cabby gave one sharp pant and started on his pilgrimage. Roaring drunk or plain barmy, the large occupant of the cab was all too plainly one to be humoured.

"Would a hundred miles bring us to dawn?"

inquired the smaller lunatic. "Oh, I'd rather a dawn than a parade any day there is, though sleeping's a grand thing, too."

"*When will you marry me?*" demanded the duke.

"We must be that wise and cool we'll put the stars to shame," she said dreamily. "How many days would there be in a year? I've no head for figures at all."

"A year?" protested the stricken duke fiercely. "Three hundred and sixty-five days? You couldn't—you couldn't——"

Biddy raised her hand to the silver laces above her heart with the strangest little look of wonder.

"Three hundred and sixty-five?" she whispered. "No more than that? No more than that—for sure?"

"No more?" he cried. "Why, it's a lifetime—it's eternity——"

"Ah, and so it is," said his Biddy. "Well, then, let's be wise as the stars—and wait till morning. Father Leary, he's an old man, and he wakes at dawn; 'tis himself that says so. He'll marry us then if I have to do penance for the rest of my days. Three hundred and sixty-five, you say? You're right—oh, you're right. 'Tis a lifetime!"

And so at dawn Biddy O'Rourke became the Duchess of Bolingham, and the greatest scandal of

the century broke over a waking city. Things like that don't happen, you say—no, things like that don't happen, except in real life or in fairy tales. But if you had asked the duke or his duchess, they could have told you that this was real life—and a fairy tale.

They drove down to Gray Courts behind a pair of bright bays called Castor and Pollux that same day, in a high trap of black and scarlet, with fawn-coloured cushions. The duke drove, and the duchess sat perched beside him in a great red postillion's coat from Redfern with a ruby ring as big as the Pope's on her finger and a hat no larger than a poppy tilted over one eye. It had a little red feather in it that wagged violently every time the bays lifted a foot, and Her Grace's tongue wagged more violently than the feather.

"Is it a castle you live in, darlin'?"

"It'll be a castle once you're in it. Who ever heard of a Princess that didn't live in a castle?"

"Is it terrible big and black and grand, like you?"

"Terrible—you couldn't tell us apart."

"Do your great sons live there all by themselves?"

"Oh, rather not. They live there with two tutors and a trainer and an old nurse and four aunts, besides all the hounds and horses and grooms

and jockeys and farriers that they can wedge into the stables."

"The Saints keep us!" invoked Biddy with heartfelt piety. "Was it four aunts you said?"

"Oh, God forgive me, I clean forgot 'em!" The duke's cry was quite as heartfelt, but it lacked piety. "No, I swear that's the truth. I sent a messenger down this morning with a letter for Noll, but not one of the lot of them entered my head—Biddy, Biddy, if I'd remembered, I'd have taken you somewhere else."

"Ah, well, it can't be helped, darlin'. It's glad news and golden that I've driven the thought of four grand ladies clear out of your head, and it's small fault of yours that so much as a whisper of the word aunt makes the soles of my feet grow cold and the hairs of my head rise up on end. If you'd known my father's sister Dasheen you'd never wonder! Maybe the four of these are nice old bodies?"

"And maybe they're not!" remarked the duke. "Gad, but I'd give a thousand pound to have them hear you calling them nice old bodies. Clarissa, now——"

He gave such a shout of laughter that the off bay swerved and Biddy had to clutch at his sleeve to keep from falling.

"Are they just young aunts then?" she inquired hopefully.

The duke let the bays fend for themselves while he kissed the ridiculous hand and the dancing feather and both of the small corners of her smile.

"Beautiful, wait till you see them! They're not aunts at all, Heaven help us—they're sisters! One of their noses would make four of yours, and every last one of them is more like Queen Elizabeth in her prime than any one going around England these days. They have fine bones and high heads and eyes like ripe hearts of icicles and tongues like serpents' tails dipped in vinegar."

"Have they now!" remarked Her Grace pensively. "Well, 'twill not be dull at Gray Courts, I can tell that from here. Was Elizabeth the cross heathen that snipped the head off the pretty light one home from France?"

"I wish I'd had your history teacher," said the duke with emphasis. "I spent years on end learning less about the ladies that you've put in a dozen words. I shouldn't wonder if cross heathens described the lot as well as anything else. I was a cross heathen myself till half-past nine last night."

"Never say it!" cried his Biddy. "You've a heart of gold and a tongue of silver, and I'm the girl that knows. 'Tis likely they'll love me no better than the cross one loved the pretty one, then?"

"'Tis likely they'll love you less," prophesied the

duke accurately, "since they can't snip off your head!"

Biddy's laughter was a flight of silver birds.

"Then since it's sorrow we're goin' to," she begged, "let's go easy. Make the horses step soft and slow, darlin'; 'tis the prettiest evening in all the world, and I'm that high up I can see clear over the great green hedges into the wee green gardens. I doubt if it'll smell any better in Heaven!"

"I doubt if it'll smell half as sweet," he said. "If we go slow we'll miss our dinner."

"Ah, let's miss our dinner!" she begged. "Did we not eat all those little fat quail and those great fat peaches for our lunch? I'd rather sup on the lights that'll be coming out behind the window-panes while we pass, and the stars that'll slip through the sky while we're not looking, and the smell of gilly-flowers and lavender warm against the walls. Maybe if we go slow, we might have a slip of new moon for dessert—maybe if we go slower than that, the horses will know what it's all about, and let you hold one of my hands."

And so the horses did, and so he did, and it was long past dinner when the duke and his duchess drove through the gates of Gray Courts, and swept proudly up the long alley with its great beech trees to the door where grooms and butlers and housekeepers and maids and men enough to start a

republic came running sedately to greet them. The duke stood them off with a gesture and held out both his hands to help his duchess down from her throne, and she laid her finger-tips in his and reached the threshold high on her toes.

"This," said the duke with a pride that made his former arrogance seem humility, "is Her Grace."

He swung her through the carved doors before the most skillful of them could do more than gape or sketch a curtsey—in the great stone hall with the flagged floor and the two fireplaces built by giants to burn oak trees she looked smaller than a child and brighter than a candle. She stood smiling as warmly at the cold and hollow suits of armour, with their chilled gleam of steel and gold and silver and the jaded plumes drooping in their helmets, as though they were her brothers, and the dun-coloured hound lying with his nose on his paws blinked twice, and rose slowly, in his huge grace, and strolled to where she stood gleaming, thrusting his great head beneath her hand.

"Oh, the wonder he is!" she cried. "What will I call him?"

"His name's Merlin," the duke told her, and he put his arm about her in full sight of the stunned household. "He knows a witch as well as the one he was named for. Layton, where are my sisters?"

"Their Ladyships have retired to their rooms, Your Grace."

"Good!" replied His Grace distinctly. "Where are my sons?"

"Their Lordships drove over late this afternoon for a dinner and theatricals at the Marquis of Dene's, Your Grace."

"Better!" said His Grace. "Then shall we go to our room, Biddy? We've not eaten; send some claret and fruit and cold fowl—what else, Biddy?"

"Some little cakes stuffed full with raisins, if there're any about," suggested Her Grace hopefully.

"Cakes," commanded the Duke of Bolingham in a voice that would have raised cakes from the stone flags. "Will you have a maid, Biddy?"

"Whatever for?" inquired Biddy with candid interest. "I've still the use of all ten of my fingers, and you'd be there to help if I broke one, wouldn't you?"

" es," said the duke, his arm closing faster about her, his voice shaken. "No maid. Is the room ready, Layton?"

"Quite ready, Your Grace." Layton seized the great black dressing-case with the gold locks and the little snakeskin jewel case that Biddy had pounced on in Bond Street that morning, and James swung up the huge pigskin bags of His

Grace, and Potter appeared from somewhere with fruit and wine, and Durkin from nowhere with a silver basket of small cakes, and a very young gentleman called Tunbridge appeared with candles that were larger than he. The duke and the duchess followed this procession up the dark splendour of the stairs, with Merlin padding superbly behind his witch. When they reached the landing the procession swung to the right.

"Here!" called Bolingham. "Which room?"

"The Damask Room, Your Grace."

"No," said His Grace. "No." He did not raise his voice, but his fingers crushed down desperately on the light ones lying in his. "We'll use the Blue Room."

The agitated voice of the housekeeper cried, "Oh, Your Grace, it's not ready!"

"Make it ready—flowers, candles, linen. Be quick."

They were quick. Feet ran, hands flew, while the duke and his duchess stood waiting in the room in which a king had slept and a prince had died, and which for a hundred years had stood empty of life, save when some awed visitor tiptoed across the threshold, marvelling at its more than royal beauty —its walls stretched with velvet blue and deep as night, its painted beams, its hooded fireplace, its great bed around which the velvet curtains swept,

brave with their golden Tudor roses; quick hands now brought other roses, wine-red in silver bowls, to sweeten the air, and sticks of wood to light a fire to warm it, for even August turned chilly in that magnificence; they spread a gay feast before the flames and fine linen on the bed; they brought high candelabra wrought of silver, more of them and more of them, until the shadows wavered and danced, and the new duchess clapped her hands and danced, too.

"That enough?" the duke asked her.

"Oh, 'tis enough to light the way from here to the pole! I'd not have said there were so many candles in all the world."

"Right," said the duke to his servitors briefly. "That's all, then. Good-night."

And the quick hands and the quick feet were gone, and the duke was left alone with his duchess.

"It's not too cold?" he asked.

"No, no!" she said. "It's fine and warm."

"It's not too dark?"

"No, no—it's fine and bright!"

"My little heart, you don't hate it? You're not afraid?"

"Afraid?" cried his heart, alight with laughter. "Afraid with you by me? Am I mad?"

He knelt at that and put his arms about her.

Even kneeling his black head was higher than her bright one.

"It's I who am afraid. Biddy, what if I made you stop smiling? Biddy, Biddy, don't ever stop smiling!"

"Never fear!" she cried. "Never fear, my dear love. I'll never in this world stop smiling——" She caught her breath, and shook her curls, and laid her laughing lips gayly and bravely against his. "Nor in the next one, either!" said Her Grace.

She kept her word. That shining mischief of hers never wavered—nothing touched it, not the frozen hatred of the four outraged ladies or the surly insolence of the three dark boys, or the indifferent disdain of the county neighbours, or the blank indignation of the court. He watched over her with terror and rage in his heart; they, they to scorn his miracle!

That first dinner, with the ladies Pamela, Clarissa, Maude, and Charlotte, looking down their high noses at the radiant intruder, pouring out venom, poison, and vinegar as freely as wine——

"Say the word," he told her through his teeth, safe in the sanctuary of their dark and beautiful room, "and the four of them shall walk to London!"

"Well, if they crawled there, 'twould be no more than they deserve!" said Her Grace with decision.

"The cross faces they have, and the mean tongues! They'd wear the patience out of a Saint."

"They can start packing now!" he cried, and made for the door.

"No, no!" Her laughter checked him like a hand. "What does it matter at all, since I'm no Saint? I'll not need patience; all I'll need is grace to keep a straight face and a civil tongue. Let them be, darlin'; 'tis a thousand pities my Aunt Dasheen died without laying eyes on them. They're like her own sisters. Did no one ever give that fine Roddy of yours a good cuff?"

"I'll give him two and a strapping," said the duke. "The glowering young cub!"

"You'd never steal such pleasure for yourself," she implored. "In no time at all they'll be gone to their schools and colleges, and I'll set what mind I have to growing tall enough to reach their ears if I stand on my toes. Would you like me better if I reached up higher?"

Their world was in that room—its four blue walls held all their heaven and earth. From its windows they saw dawns break and nights fall; when they crossed its threshold they stepped under a spell that held them safe from all disaster. No one had ever loved any one as he loved his little golden duchess; sometimes he smiled gravely and indulgently when he thought of the poor travesties that

passed in the world for adoration. Dante and the girl that crossed the bridge in her wine-coloured gown—tragic and absurd to call that love, which was not strong enough to win a kiss! Paolo and Francesca stealing hot glances over a closed book in a garden—blasphemous to think that love could come clothed in secrecy and guilt. And those frantic, desperate children of the Capulets and Montagues—was love, then, something shot with blood and tears? No, no, love was shot with beauty and with mirth—love was his Biddy, dancing through darkness to his arms.

When some unshirkable duty called him from her to the London that they had forgotten he would possess his soul with what patience he might until the doors of Gray Courts opened once more, and before the doors had swung to behind his voice would ring out—

"Where is Her Grace?"

They never had need to tell him; before the words were off his lips he would hear her light feet, running to reach him across the long halls, the dark stairs.

When winter hung the world in silver frost they piled the fire higher and drew the curtains closer and sat wrapped warm in dreaming happiness while the winds roared and lashed over the world.

"Shall I take you to London?" he asked her.

"London?" she cried in wonder. "Oh, whatever for?"

"You're not dull here? You're not lonely?"

"Dull? With you? Lonely—lonely with you?"

After awhile she lifted her head and locked her fingers fast in his, and asked,

"When is your birthday?"

"In July—the twenty-fifth. Why?"

"I'll have a grand present for you," said Her Grace. "A baby. A baby that'll have a yellow head and a twinkle in both his eyes. A baby that'll grow tall enough to thrash the wickedness out of his black brothers and have sense enough to laugh instead of doing it."

He bowed his head over the linked fingers.

"Biddy, what more will you give me, you who have given me all the world?"

"'Tis a small thing," she whispered. "July. That will be a year since you came to see me dance?"

"A year, my heart."

"How many days are there in a year, did you say?"

"Three hundred and sixty-five."

"A day—a day is a poor short thing," said Her Grace. "If I had a wish, I'd wish them longer.

'Tis cold in here, with the wind roaring down the chimney. Hold me closer—hold me fast."

And with spring her wish was granted, and the days were longer; not long enough to hold the joy they poured into them—but filled to the brim with pale sunlight and primroses and hawthorn hedges. And it was June, and they were longer still, flooded with golden warmth and the smell of yellow roses and life and magic, and the taste of honey. And it was July, and it was his birthday—and the world stood still.

Her Grace gave him the yellow-headed baby for a birthday present. When they brought him his son he looked at him with strange eyes and turned his face away and asked them in a voice that none would have known,

"How is she now?"

The great doctors who had come hurrying from London shook their heads, and were grave and pompous and learned.

"Bad. Her heart was in a shocking condition —she had not told you?"

No—no, she had not told him.

"Well, we must hope; we must hope."

But soon they could no longer hope; soon hope was gone. For all their dignity, for all their learning, they could only give her drugs to make it easier to die; they could only prop her up against

the pillows in the great Tudor bed, and smooth the dark coverlet, and tiptoe from the room, leaving her to her duke. She sat there still and small, her hands on his black head where he knelt beside her, with so little breath left to tell him of her love that she sought the shortest words, she who had been a spendthrift of them.

"Darlin'." He did not stir, even at that. "Never grieve. I've known it a great while; they told me in London before you came that 'twould be no more than a year. And my Aunt Dasheen, she was wise before they. 'Wed at seventeen, dead at eighteen'——"

"Biddy," he whispered, "I've killed you—I've killed you."

"Oh, what talk is this? You, who gave me my life? I never minded the dying—'twas only when I thought how lonely it would be, with no one caring whether I came or went. I've forgotten what loneliness is with you by me. Look up at me."

He raised his head—and her eyes were dancing.

"Has it yellow hair?"

"Yes."

"Will you teach it to laugh?"

"Biddy—Biddy——"

"'Twill be dull in Heaven without you," she said. "But 'twill be gay when you come." She

leaned toward him, her lips curved to mischief. "Wait till they tell my Aunt Dasheen—Saint Peter himself will have to laugh. 'Woman, there's someone just come asking after you—a little one, even on her toes. She says her name is Biddy and she's Duchess of Bolingham——'"

The faint voice trailed to airy mirth, and with that music echoing still about her Her Grace closed her dancing eyes, and closed her laughing lips, and turned her bright head away and was gone, as lightly and swiftly as she had come.

THE HONOURABLE TONY

"YOU actually mean to tell me that you don't want to get out of this dripping hole?"

"My dear old ass, why on earth should I want to get out of it?"

Anthony Christopher Stoningham Calvert faced the incredulous glare of the freckle-faced young gentleman from Ohio with engaging candour. Four years of soaking in tropical pest holes and rioting from Monte Carlo to Rio, from Shanghai to Singapore, since they had met, and yet there he sat, sprawled out full length in his great cane chair, as cool and shameless and unconquerably youthful as though he had just been sent down from Oxford for the first time. Even in the light that filtered in through the cane shutters, green and strange as the pallid glow that washes through aquariums, it was clear that time had found no power to touch that long grace, that bright head with its ruffled crop of short hair, those gay eyes, wide set and mischievous in the brown young face, those absurd dimples, carved deep into the lean curve of the cheek. Young Ledyard

gave a bark of outraged protest, his pleasant face flushed and exasperated under its thatch of sandy hair.

"You mean it? You aren't coming back with me?"

"Not for all the gold in the Indies, my dear kid —or out of them either, if it comes to that." The Honourable Tony, as he had been dubbed by a scandalized and diverted public, grinned alluringly through the vaguely sinister light at his onetime comrade at arms. "The whole thing is absolutely ripping, I tell you, and the only thing that I ask is to spend the next sixty years doing precisely what I'm doing now."

"I don't believe you," rejoined his baffled guest flatly. "Why in God's name should you want to rot your life away in a little backwater Hell, when I can give you a first-rate job twenty-four hours after we land in America?"

"But, my dear fellow, I wouldn't have your job as a birthday gift. You may be the heir apparent to the greatest rubber business in the whole jolly globe, but try to bear in mind that you see before you the chief, sole, and official British Imperial Adviser to the fattest little Sultan in Asia—who incidentally eats up every word of wisdom that falls from his adviser's lips and sits up and begs for more, let me tell you."

"And let me tell *you* that it's common gossip in every gutter in Singapore that your Sultan's a black-hearted scoundrel who's only waiting for a chance to double-cross England and do you one in the eye."

"What happens to be the current gutter gossip about his adviser?" inquired that gentleman blandly.

Ledyard's jaw looked suddenly aggressive.

"Never mind what it happens to be. What I want to know is why your friend Bhakdi isn't back in his dirty little capital trying to straighten out some of the messes he's got himself into instead of squatting up here in the jungle hunting tigers?"

"Because his invaluable adviser advises him to stay precisely where he is," explained the Honourable Tony cheerfully. "Just between us, there are several nasty bits of international complications and one or two strictly domestic ones that make a protracted absence from the native heath highly advisable—oh, highly. Besides, you'd hardly have us trot back without a tiger, would you? I assure you that so far we haven't bagged a solitary one. Not a tiger, Bill, not a tiger!"

"Oh, for the love of the Lord, shut up! I tell you this whole thing's a rotten, ugly, dangerous business, and I didn't come crawling up through Hades to have you turn it into a joke. I can't

stay jawing about it, and you know it—it's going to be a darned close squeak to make connections with the steamer as it is. Are you coming or are you not?"

"I are not. Do quiet down and tell me why it is that you're totally unable to distinguish between comic opera and melodrama? This whole performance is the purest farce, I swear! Wait till you see his Imperial Majesty—as nice a buttery, pompous little blighter as you'd want to lay eyes on, who's spent six months at Cambridge and comes to heel like a spaniel if you tell him that anything in the world 'isn't done.' He has a solid gold bicycle and four unhappy marriages and a body-guard with bright green panties and mother-of-pearl handles to their automatics! You wouldn't expect even a Chinaman to take that seriously, would you?"

"I should think you'd go mad in your head trying to get along with a bounder who doesn't know the first thing in the world about your code of standards or——"

"William, you are the most frightful donkey! The only code that I've recognized since I pattered off the ancestral estate is the jolly dot-dash thing that they use for telegrams. I've finally got our Bhakdi to the point where he drills his troops in pure British and plays a cracking good game of

auction bridge without cheating—civilization's greatest triumph in the Near or Far East. Personally, I ask no more of it!"

Ledyard mopped his brow despairingly. The dim room with its snowy matting and pale green cushions looked cool enough, but the heat outside would have penetrated a refrigerator. Just the other side of those protecting shutters the sun was beating down on the quiet waters until they glared back like burning silver—the tufts of palm and bamboo were hanging like so many dejected jade banners in the breathless air—the ridiculous little houses were huddled clumsily together on their ungainly piles, shrinking unhappily under their huge hats of nippa thatch.

"It's a filthy, poisonous hole!" he protested fiercely. "It beats me why you can't see it. If anything went wrong here, you wouldn't have a white man in a hundred miles to turn to. You needn't laugh. There's nothing so howlingly funny about it. What about that Scotch engineer who was so everlastingly intimate with your precious Bhakdi's next-door neighbour?"

"Well, what about him? The poor chap fell down a shaft and broke his neck."

"Oh, he did, did he? Well, believe me, that's not what they say in Singapore! Calvert, for God's *sake*, get out of this infernal place. Every

inch of it smells of death and damnation. How any one who calls himself an English gentleman can stick it for a minute——"

"But I don't call myself an English gentleman," the Honourable Tony assured him earnestly. "God forbid! I call myself an out-and-out waster exiled for ever from the Mother Country by a cruel and powerful elder brother. The only trick in it is that I'm simply cuckoo with ecstasy over the entire situation. Not according to Kipling, what? No, the glittering prospect of spending the remaining years of a misspent life in the largest rubber factory in Ohio leaves me considerably colder than ice."

"I suggested Ohio because I happen to be in charge of that plant myself," returned Ledyard stiffly. "If you'd rather have a go at one of the others——"

"But, my good child, it seems impossible to make you understand that the factory has not been built for which I would exchange one single baked banana soaked in rum and moonlight. Think of the simply hideous sacrifices that I'd make, can't you?—taking advice instead of being paid good round guineas for giving it—working for one beastly hour after another instead of slipping from one golden minute to the next—drinking nasty chemical messes in constant terror of

sudden death or prison bars, instead of tossing off bumpers and flagons and buckets of delectable fluids that smell like flowers and shine like jewels—dragging around to the most appalling festivals where pampered little females tip up their ridiculous powdered noses and distribute two minutes of their precious dances as though they were conferring the Order of the Garter, instead of——"

Ledyard looked suddenly three shades hotter beneath his freckles.

"Thanks—glad to know how much you enjoyed your visit."

"I enjoyed every minute of it to the point of explosion, as you are thoroughly well aware. If I live to ninety-two, I shall remember the excellent yarns that your father spun over those incredibly good cigars and that simply immortal corn pudding, and the shoulders on the little red-headed creature in the black dress at the Country Club—good Lord, William, the shoulders on that creature! After four years of not especially pretty smells and not especially pretty noises, what do you think that those July evenings under the awnings on your veranda meant to a God-forsaken flying chap back from the wars, William?"

William looked frankly unappeased.

"A hell of a lot of difference it makes what I think! I know one God-forsaken flying chap who

thought it wasn't good enough for him, by a long shot. Not while he could hop off and rot his soul out in a water-logged bamboo shack in Asia!"

The owner of the bamboo shack settled deeper into his chair with a graceless and engaging grin.

"My dear chap, it was Heaven, pure and simple —but a dash too pure and simple for some of us. Every man his own Heaven, what? Well, you're sitting in mine at the present. Of course it mightn't suit any one with even an elementary code of principles, but having none of any kind or description it suits me down to the ground and up to the sky."

"Oh, bunk!" commented Ledyard with fervent irritation. "You've got all the principles you need; do you think that I'd have come chasing up this unspeakable river in everything from a motor-boat to a raft after any howling blackguard?"

"Well, it's rather one on you, isn't it, dear boy? Because it's so absolutely what you've up and gone and done—though through no earthly fault of mine, you know! Rather not. Didn't I spend four jolly busy years trying to get it through your thick skull that I was ninety-nine different varieties of blighter, and that nice little American kids with freckles on their noses shouldn't come trotting around my propellers?"

"Hey, how do you get that way?" The nice

little American kid raised his voice in poignant irritation. "Kid! If any one ever took the trouble to give you two looks they'd think you'd bounced straight out of rompers into long trousers without waiting for knickerbockers. Kid!"

"Old in iniquity, William, old in iniquity," explained the Honourable Tony blithely. "Physically I grant that I'm fairly in the pink, but morally I'm edging rapidly into senile decay. I pledge you my word, which is worth considerably less than nothing, that I haven't as many morals as I have side whiskers. And even you, my dear old chap, will be willing to admit that I don't go in heavily for side whiskers. Take a long piercing look."

Ledyard scowled wretchedly at the impish countenance blandly presented for inspection.

"The trouble with you is that you simply can't take it in that any one on the whole bally globe could prefer a Bengal tiger to a British lion and a bird of paradise to an American eagle. You see before you a foul monstrosity who would trade all the British Isles for twenty yards of jungle, and gloat over his bargain. Have a cigarette?"

"No, I won't have a cigarette. You make me so sick and tired with all that jaw about what a devil you are that I could yell. Once and for all, are you going to drop it and come back with me?"

"Once and for all I am not going to move one quarter of an inch. Stop jawing yourself for a minute, and try to see it my way. If you'd been chivvied about for your entire life by a lot of frenzied vestals for aunts who were trying to guide you to what they unfortunately considered grace, and three simply appalling bounders for brothers who set up the most frightful howl over the Bolingham name and the Bolingham honour and the Bolingham fortune every time the youngest member of the Bolingham family picked a primrose, you'd good and well think you were in Heaven if you could get out of earshot of their ghastly voices."

"Damn it all!" cried young Ledyard violently. "You haven't got the nerve to sit up there and tell me that you call this filthy water-hole Heaven?"

"Oh, I haven't, haven't I?" The Honourable Tony regarded the flushed countenance with pensive amusement. "I say, you Americans do have the most amazing cheek! Who ever asked you to come puffing and blowing into my own particular earthly Paradise and start in slanging it all over the shop? Filthy water-hole, by Gad! You won't recognize Heaven when you have the milk and gold and harps and honey stuck under your silly nose."

Ledyard rose sharply to his feet.

"All right, I'll be off, then, and not waste any more of the valuable time that you're employing so profitably. As you suggest, no one asked me to hurl myself into your affairs, and you've managed to make it good and clear that I was a lunatic to think that you'd take advice or help from me or any other well-meaning fool on the face of the earth. If you'll get hold of one of those black swine that make up your circle of friends, these days, and tell them to get my men and the raft——"

"My dear old chap!" The Honourable Tony was at Ledyard's side in two great strides, his arm was about Ledyard's shoulders in the old, remembered gesture of gay affection. "For God's sake, do try to remember that I am simply a feather-headed goat who can't for the life of him say three consecutive inoffensive syllables—I give you my word that I was born with both feet in my mouth—actually! As for your taking the time and trouble to come tooting up that frightful river in order to throw me a life-line, I could sit down and howl with emotion whenever I think of it—no, I swear that's the truth! Do sit down again like a good chap—it's absolute rot to talk about going before sundown; the sun would simply melt you down like a tallow candle. Besides, the jetty-eyed companion of your travels isn't back from her

interview with His Majesty, and you can hardly abandon her to our tender mercies—oh, well, hardly! I say, didn't you gather that she was going to romp straight back to our sheltering wings as soon as she'd presented the heart-wrung petition?"

"If you believe two words the lying little devil says, you're a worse fool than I am!" said Ledyard gloomily.

The Honourable Tony shouted his delight.

"Where's all this hundred per cent. American chivalry? What an absolutely shocking way to talk about a perfect lady who touchingly relies on your being a perfect gentleman. 'Meestair Billee Ledyar', allaways, allaways he conduck heemself like a mos' pairfick genteelman!'"

He shouted again at the sight of Meestair Billee Ledyar's revolted countenance.

"Calvert, when I think what I've been through with that beastly limpet, jabbering all day and hysterics all night—it's nothing short of a miracle that I didn't bash her head against the anchor and feed her to the crocodiles. Who the devil is she, anyway?"

"Daisy de Vallorosa? My dear chap, why ask me?"

"Well, I do ask you. She seems to know who you are all right!"

"Does she, indeed? Upon my word, that's interesting!"

He cocked his head attentively, guileless and inscrutable.

"Yes, she does indeed. Come on—let me in on this! Did she honestly come up here to get help for a brother dying in the tin mines, or is this a rendezvous that the two of you fixed up in Singapore?"

His host looked shocked but magnanimous.

"William, William—no, frankly, you appall me! What a sordid mind you have under that sunny exterior; out upon you! I never make rendezvous —absolutely not."

"Well, she swore that she'd met you and Bhakdi at a special concert while he was visiting Singapore."

"Oh, extremely special," murmured the Honourable Tony, a reminiscent gleam in his eye. "Rather! She sang some little songs that were quite as special as anything I've ever heard in my life, and at one time or another I've heard a good few. Bhakdi was most frightfully bowled over; he gave her two hammered gold buckles and a warm invitation to drop in on him at any time that she was in the neighbourhood. I rather fancy that that's what's at the bottom of all this; taking one thing with another, I'm inclined to believe that

Necessity became a Mother again when our little Daisy barged into you, and that the expiring brother is simply one of her inventive offspring. Hence, death and the tin mines! By the way, just how *did* the young female barge into you?"

"She had the next seat on the train from Singapore, curse her!" replied Ledyard vindictively. "And she sat there as good and quiet as pie, squeaking out, 'Yes, I sank you' and 'No, I sank you' every time I asked her if she wanted the window up, or the shades down or—or anything. I tell you butter wouldn't have melted in her nasty little painted mouth! Then when we found that you and Bhakdi had lit out after tigers, and I decided that I'd just have time before the next boat to hire a crew and hunt you down, she went off into twenty-one different kinds of hysterics until I promised to bring her along, too. 'Five meenit—only five small lil' meenit to spik weeth the gr-reat, the good Sultan, and the gr-reat, nobl' Honable Meestaire Tonee Calver', and her Manuelo would be restore once more to her arms.' When I think that I fell for that I could choke down a quart of carbolic straight."

"Oh, I can quite see how it came about—quite, quite!" murmured the Honourable Tony, pensively sympathetic.

"Believe me, you can't see the half of it!"

Ledyard ran a frenzied hand through the sandy hair. "Listen, how about getting away now, before she turns up?"

"Well, upon my word, you unprincipled young devil, I've yet to hear a cooler proposition! Damme if you don't curdle the blood—damme if you don't. Are you asking me to sit by and condone a callous desertion of this young female to the lures of a wily and dissolute potentate?"

Ledyard faced his delighted inquisitor unabashed.

"Oh, go on—I'll bet that's what she's after—and if you ask me, he's plenty good enough for her. She's probably a cousin of his; any one with all that fuzzy black hair and those black saucer eyes and nasty glittery little teeth——"

"Wrong again, dear boy. The lady is undeniably the legitimate offspring of Lady Scott's English maid and a Portuguese wine merchant, born in Madeira. She is also a British subject, being the legitimate widow of the late Tommy Potts, one-time pianist of the Imperial Doll Baby Girls."

"Widow?" demanded Ledyard incredulously.

"Widow and orphan, William. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Tommy, alas, passed away while they were touring New Zealand, in a distressingly complicated attack of appendicitis and D. T.'s. She didn't tell you?"

"No, she did not tell me," replied William somewhat aggressively. "See here, how do you happen to know so much about this Portuguese Empire Doll Baby?"

"A trifling matter of a passport, William. Purely as a business matter it became my painful duty to excavate the lady's buried past."

Ledyard eyed him suspiciously.

"I believe she's gone on you and you know it," he said gloomily. "Anyway, if she doesn't turn up pretty soon, I'm going to pull out, and that's that. You and Bhakdi can fight it out between the two of you—I'm through chaperoning Daisy de Vallorosa Potts from now on."

"Sorry, but you're going to have to chaperon her clear back to Singapore," the Honourable Tony assured him inflexibly. "If there's one thing that I simply cannot and will not stick it's cheap powder, and if there are two things that I simply cannot and will not stick—it's cheap perfume. The less they cost, the more they use. Lord, Lord, the perfume that little hussy uses!"

"If she's a British subject, it's your job to look out for her. She's under your protection."

"My dear kid, I wouldn't disturb this enchanting existence by lifting a finger to protect Queen Victoria from Don Juan."

"Well, she'd better step lively," remarked her

late escort ominously. "I'm not joking, you know—if I don't make connections with that boat in Singapore, I'm as good as disinherited! My Governor's not so gone on you that he'd consider you any excuse for missing two boats, you know."

"Not for missing one, you young ass." The gay eyes dwelt on him deeply for a moment, mocking and affectionate. "Your very able parent was one fellow who never entertained any illusions as to my intrinsic merit, wasn't he?"

Ledyard drew a long breath, his face a little pale.

"Yes," he said slowly, "he was. That was one of the things I wanted to talk to you about. It's hard to talk to you about anything like that, Calvert!"

"Like what?"

The tone was hardly encouraging for all its amiability, but young Ledyard pushed doggedly ahead.

"Like that—anything serious or intimate or real. You make it darned difficult, let me tell you."

"Then why do it?"

"Oh, not because I want to!" His angry, tired young face bore unmistakable testimony to that. "Believe me, if I were consulting my own pleasure I'd have told you to go to the devil the first time you tried any of that condescending impertinence of yours on me."

"Is it beside the mark to ask you just whose pleasure you *are* consulting, then?"

Young Ledyard set his teeth hard.

"Pattie's," he said, very distinctly.

The Honourable Tony did not stir, but the eyes that he fixed on Pattie's brother went suddenly and incredibly black. After a long pause he repeated, evenly and courteously,

"Pattie's?"

"Yes, Pattie's. That's half of why I came—the other half, if you want to know, is because I'm fool enough to care more about you than any other man I ever met—than any other two men."

The wide eyes were suddenly blue again.

"Thanks," said the Honourable Tony, and there was something startlingly sweet in his smile. "Thanks awfully. It's quite mutual, you know—any three men, I should say offhand. Suppose we simply let it go at that? And do try one of these cigarettes; they really are first-rate."

"I can't let it go at that, I tell you—I wish to the Lord I could. Pattie had it all out with Dad, and she made me swear that I'd run you down when I got out here and bring you back. She said that if I couldn't work it any other way I was to tell you that she said 'Please.' I'm at the end of my rope, Calvert—and Pattie says 'Please.'"

The Honourable Tony raised his hand sharply, staring through Pattie's brother as though he saw someone else. Possibly he did see someone else—someone as clear and cool in that dim, hot room as a little spring, someone who stood there very small and straight with young Ledyard's sandy hair clasping her brows like a wreath of autumn leaves, and young Ledyard's gray eyes turned to two dancing stars, and young Ledyard's freckles trailing a faint gold powder across the very tip of her tilted nose—someone as brave and honest as a little boy and as wistful and gentle as a little girl, who stood clasping her hands together tightly, and said "Please."

"No, by God!" cried the Honourable Tony loudly. "No!"

"Don't yell like that." Ledyard rapped the words out fiercely. "I'm not deaf—all you have to say is 'no' once. If it's any satisfaction to you to know it, I'm through."

He rose to his feet and his host rose, too, swiftly, catching at his arm.

"Rather got the wind up, haven't we, old thing? No, don't jerk away; it's simply rotten bad manners, and throws me off my stride completely when I'm preparing to do the thing in the grand manner—apologies, and *amendes honorables* and every mortal trick in the bag. You're absolutely right,

you know. It's far too hot to start shouting, and I swear that I'll keep quiet if you will. We might toss off a stirrup cup of quinine, what?"

"I believe that you'd laugh at a corpse," said Ledyard fiercely.

The Honourable Tony eyed him for a moment strangely—and then shrugged his shoulders.

"At a corpse—exactly. And there you are!"

"Well, where am I? D'you want me to tell Pattie that all you have to say to her is 'No, by God'?"

"I want you to tell Pattie just exactly nothing whatever; say that I was off tiger hunting with the Sultan, and that you couldn't get track of me to save your soul."

"Thanks; I don't go in for lies—more especially not with Pattie."

"I see." The Honourable Tony, his hands deep in his pockets, evidently saw something not entirely flattering, judging from the curl to his lip. After a minute, however, he dismissed it with another careless shrug. "Oh, spare your conscience by all means. Give Pattie my love, then, and tell her that I'd like most awfully to run up and wipe her out at tennis, but that I'm so indispensable here that I can't possibly make it."

"That all?"

"Quite all, thanks."

"But, good Lord, I tell you that she *wants* you——"

"You misunderstood her."

"Don't be a fool. She told me——"

The Honourable Tony jerked forward suddenly, his fingers biting into Ledyard's arm, his low voice savage as a whip.

"Drop it, will you? *Drop it!*" At the sight of the blank and stricken amazement in the other's eyes he broke off sharply, his fingers relaxing their grip. "Oh, Lord love us, we're both fit for a madhouse! Throw some water over me—pound my head against the wall—do something but stand there staring like another lunatic. Pull your jaw back, there's a good kid."

Ledyard stared at him wretchedly.

"But, Calvert, I swear that I don't understand. I thought—we all thought—that you—that you cared for her——"

"My dear fellow, what in the world has that got to do with it? The more I cared for her the less likely I'd be to go within a thousand miles of her. For God's sake, and Pattie's sake, and my sake, try to get this straight. I am absolutely no good. I don't mean that I'm one of your deep-dyed, hair-raising villains—no such luck; I'm simply a waster and rotter of the very first water who's gone to and fro over the face of the earth doing the

things that he ought not to have done, and leaving undone the things that he ought to have done for more years than he cares to remember. You're worse than mad to tempt me to forget it; don't do it again, there's a good chap. And while you're about it, try and remember that the best there is isn't half good enough for Pattie."

Ledyard swallowed hard.

"I don't care—you can talk till you're black in the face, and I won't believe that you know yourself. If it came to a show-down, you'd be as good as the best."

"Thanks. As it's not likely to, you can take my word for it that I'm not of the stuff of which heroes are made, even in a pinch. Now that that's settled, how about hunting up the little Vallorosa hussy? It's getting on a bit."

"I hope to the Lord she's decided to settle here for life."

"Oh, rot. Tell you what, if the young thing doesn't turn up pretty promptly, we'll call out the royal, holy, gold-fringed, pearl-tasselled, diamond-studded red parasols, and romp over in time to cadge some light refreshments from His Majesty. He has a cognac that will make you sit up and yelp with excitement; Napoleon—the real stuff, I pledge you my word. I suppose that it will be simply thrown away on you; half a nip of prune cordial

sets the good old world going round for you Yankee martyrs these days, what?"

"Help!" invoked Ledyard with gloomy fervour. "Glad to know you get the comic sections regularly."

"My priceless old thing, we get nothing whatever regularly; that's one of the unholy charms. When my royal master and pupil feels any craving for mail and newspapers and other foreign frivolities he summons about twenty of the stalwart flowers of the masculine population and bids them oil and decorate and adorn themselves as befits the occasion and pop into the old lacquer sampans and yo heave ho on business of state. A few days or a few weeks later they turn up like Santa Claus bearing gifts, and I take all the pretty envelopes with an English postmark and put them in a nice tin can with a nice round stone, and drop 'em out of the window plop into the jolly old river—returned unopened, with many, many thanks! You never can tell when one of the tricky little devils might read 'Anthony, come home, all is forgiven.'"

"But, my Lord, they must be worried half frantic! How do they know whether you're alive or dead?"

"My dear chap, the only thing that the Bolinghams have ever worried about as far as little Anthony Christopher's concerned was that he

mightn't have the grace to die before one of his waggish pranks landed him in jail or actually cost them something in pounds and shillings instead of mere lamentations! That's why I gratified them by throwing over my share of the title when I came of age. Lord Anthony, what? No, thanks. But it's all too clear that you don't know Aunt Pamela and Aunt Clarissa, the last of the Bolingham vestals, or those splendid fellows, Roderick, Cyril, and Oliver."

"Good-night, I'd hate to be as bitter as that about my worst enemy." Ledyard's honest drawl was chilled and thoughtful.

"Bitter? About my priceless family?" His careless mirth flooded the quiet room. "No, I swear that's good! Why, my child, I revel in 'em; I have ever since Oliver used to jerk me out of bed at two in the morning to wallop the everlasting soul out of me because he'd lost at *écarté*—ragging along all the time about how it was his sacred duty as head of the Bolingham family to see that I learned not to disgrace it again by getting in through the scullery window at nine o'clock of a fine August night. I wasn't more than three feet high, with a face no bigger than a button, but I couldn't keep it straight then and I can't keep it straight now when I think of that enormous red mug of his with all those noble sentiments pouring

out of it—and the harder he walloped and the nobler he gabbled, the more I knew he'd lost. I was Satan's own limb even in those days, and he generally managed to dig up some excellent and fruity reason for improving the witching hours with a boot-strap, but it undeniably was one on both of us that the night that he lost one hundred and thirty-seven golden guineas I'd been in bed in a state of grace since early dawn, with a nice bit of fever and a whopping toothache."

"And just what did he do about that?" inquired Ledyard grimly. He did not seem to be as carried away by the humour of the situation as the Honourable Tony, whose carved dimples had become riotous at memory.

"Oh, you simply have to credit Noll for resource—he trounced the skin off me for adding hypocrisy to my list of iniquities! And there was I, innocent as a water baby of guilt or guile for twenty-four priceless hours—you'll have to admit that it was a good one on me. I've taken jolly good care from that day to this that I didn't let a night come around without deserving a simply first-rate caning, let me tell you!"

Ledyard made a gesture of fierce disgust.

"Do you mean to tell me that your own brother beat you night after night and no one lifted a hand to stop him?"

"Oh, well, come, who do you think was going to stop him?" inquired the Honourable Tony with indulgent amusement. "After all, the noble Duke had a fairly good right to see that a cheeky brat learned all of the sacred traditions of the family from the sacred head of the family, hadn't he? Well, rather! All the more to his credit that the little jackanapes wasn't his own brother."

"Wasn't?" echoed Ledyard blankly.

"Oh, come, come—you don't mean to say that no one's told you the true history of the little black sheep rampant on the Bolingham arms? No? Oh, I say, I *am* let down—— I thought all you chaps used to jaw about it for hours between flights! No one even said a word about it down the river? Well, there's glory for you; it begins to look as though I'd won your kind attentions under entirely false pretences, my dear kid. All the time that you've been thinking me a purely blue specimen of the British aristocracy I've been a black skeleton and a dancing sheep and a mere paltry half brother to His Grace the Duke of Bolingham—and it begins to look as though I were an impostor to boot. I say, I *am* sick."

He looked far from sick; leaning back in the long chair with his brown hands clasped behind his bright head, he looked radiantly and outrageously amused.

Ledyard gave a vicious kick to an innocuous rattan stool.

"I don't know what you're driving at, but if you're implying that the reason that I was misguided enough to choose you for a friend, was that you happened to have a duke for your father, you can shut your mouth and eat your words. I'd always understood that you were Bolingham's son, but I don't give a curse if he picked you out of an ash-can, and you know it. Dukes mean nothing in my young life, let me tell you. If you aren't Bolingham's son, who are you?"

"Oh, I'm Bolingham's son, all right enough, only unlike Noll and Cyril and Roddie, I don't happen to be able to claim the Lady Alicia Honoria Fortescue as my mother. No, no, nothing to bring the blush of shame to that ingenuous brow, William. The lady died some eighteen years before I arrived on the scene, so neither of us can be blamed, you'll admit. My mother's name happened to be Biddy O'Rourke, and I'd be willing to take an oath that she was prouder of that and being able to dance longer on her toes than any one else in the London music halls, than of the minor matter of bearing the title of Duchess of Bolingham and having forty-two servants call her 'Your Grace.' Your Grace! I shouldn't be surprised if it fitted her better than the Lady Alicia Honoria."

"You mean he was married to her?"

"Rather—rather, my young sleuth! There was all too little doubt on that score to make it pleasant for any one but the unregenerate Duke and his Duchess. It seemed to afford them considerable amusement."

"I didn't know that dukes married—married artists." Young Ledyard eyed his host with suspicion; he had fallen victim more than once to the soaring flights of that gentleman's imagination.

"They don't; that was exactly what furnished all the ripe excitement. He not only married her, but he was most frightfully set up about it—fairly swollen with pride. Nothing damped them, as far as I can learn; Society and the Court and the whole blooming family went off their heads with excitement and cut her and insulted her and disowned her—and she laughed in their faces and danced on their toes. She thought that the whole thing was the most stupendous joke; Bunny says that there never were five minutes after she came to Gray Courts that you couldn't hear her laughing or singing somewhere about the place—and sometimes doing both at once."

"Who's Bunny?"

"Bunny was her maid—afterward she was my own private slave until the magnificent Noll showed her the gates of the ancestral home after she'd

locked me up in her room one night when he was out hunting for me with the boot-strap! She went off into the most stunning hysterics right outside the door and called him a bloody roaring monster what ought to have his heart cut out for laying a finger on an innocent lamb. And when they fished the innocent lamb out from under the bed and informed him between larrups that his Bunny had been hurled into outer darkness by two footmen and an under-gardener, he let out the last howls of his life. He'd reached the mature age of six and a half, but he hasn't lost or found anything since worth a single solitary howl!"

"Why didn't your mother and father stop them?" demanded Ledyard, looking stern and sick and still faintly incredulous.

"Because the only active interference they were capable of at the time would have been with a Ouija board," explained the Honourable Tony affably. "Exit Biddy, Duchess of Bolingham, laughing, on the day that young Anthony Christopher Stoningham Calvert makes his first bow to a ravished family. I'll wager that before she slipped off she realized that it was a good one on all of us, too!"

"Well, but what happened to your father?"

"Oh, the Black Duke, as he was impolitely referred to, hadn't extracted any amusement from

life before he discovered his Biddy, and once she was gone, he evidently considered it a dingy affair. He slunk around the empty corridors for a bit hunting for the echo of her laughter, but he got tired of that game, too, and died of pneumonia and boredom without making any particular fuss—though Bunny swears that after everyone in the room thought he was gone for good and they all were filing out of the room on the tips of reverent toes, he flung back his head and gave one great roar of laughter—the kind of a roar that he used to give when he'd come on little Biddy in a dark hall, dancing out an imitation of the Bolingham vestals at their weekly task of patronizing the parish poor. Bunny said that it fair scared the breath out of their bodies, but when they went back he was lying there as dead as last year's wild boar."

"Calvert, are you making this up?"

The Honourable Tony turned his head sharply toward his interlocutor, his dark eyes narrowed to slits. After a moment's cold scrutiny of the troubled countenance, he shrugged his shoulders with a not highly diverted laugh.

"My dear kid, I suppose that I've asked for this by over-valuing your powers of discrimination! Just as a tip, though, I may pass on to you the information that even the clown in the circus is apt

to draw the line at playing the giddy fool over his mother. I might add, moreover, that my fertile imagination would balk at inventing any one as delightful as the lady who did me the honour to be mine."

Ledyard, flushed to the bone, met the ironic gaze with considerable dignity.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "As you imply, I'm a tasteless fool."

"And so you're in excellent company!" his host assured him. "I will now rapidly descend from the ancestral high-horse and prove to you, strictly as a matter of penance, that I am not invariably a liar. If you'll wait just half a shake, I'll present you to Biddy, ninth Duchess of Bolingham."

He vanished into the room at the back with a reassuring gleam over his shoulder at young Ledyard's startled countenance, and was back in rather less than half a shake with a shabby black case in his hands. He put it carefully on the table between them, touched a spring, and stepped with a low bow.

"There!" he announced. "Madame Biddy, the American kid with the freckles—you know the one. Mr. Bill Ledyard from Ohio, the Duchess of Bolingham—from Ireland."

Out of the black velvet frame there smiled, wicked and joyful, a tiny vision of gold and ivory

and sapphire. The head, with its froth of bright curls, lightly tilted—the nose tilted, too—and the lips tilted, too—there she sat laughing down the years, gay as a flower, reckless as a butterfly, lovely as a dream.

"Buffets and insults and three inimitable step-children and four incomparable sisters-in-law—and then some artist chap came along and painted her like this!" The Honourable Tony leaned over, touching the gauzy folds of the dress with a light and caressing finger. "She's a bit incredible, after all, you know! They were going to crush all that life and laughter clear down into the earth, and away she went dancing through their fingers into the dust that was just a flower garden to her. She's more alive this minute than they'll ever be in all their everlasting stale lives. Ah, Biddy darlin', look at you now after flirtin' with the fine young man from America, and you with the blessed saints to teach you wisdom all these weary long years."

Ledyard stared down at her, young and awed and tongue-tied.

"She's—she's the prettiest thing that I ever saw—honestly."

"Oh, prettier than that, young Bill. She's the prettiest thing that ever lived—or ever died. And she was such a lovely little lunatic herself that

we get on famously. We know what a joke it all is, don't we, Biddy? God be praised, we even know when it's on us. There now, back you go, mavourneen, while Mr. Billee Ledyar' and I start out hunting for another lady. Bill, take a look across the *kampong* at the sun while I hunt up my helmet—if it's lower than Bhakdi's roof you'd better be off. It goes down like a rocket in these parts, once it gets started."

Young Ledyard flung open the great wooden door that had barred out the heat, and a little breeze came dancing in, barely stirring the strange glossy leaves that clustered about the ladder-like steps. The sky was blue as steel; behind the black shadow of the Sultan's residence there were livid streaks—the world was silent and alien as a dream. He shivered strongly, and stepped back into the room.

"The sun's set," he said. "There's someone coming across from that shack you call a palace."

The Honourable Tony strolled leisurely out of his bedroom.

"Ghundi!" he commented after a brief inspection. "The incomparable Ghundi."

"Who the devil's Ghundi?"

"He's my head boy, William, and the delight of my soul; the only honest man I ever knew, saving your presence. I've taught him English, and

he's taught me considerably more than that—oh, considerably. What tidings, Ghundi?"

The bronze statue saluted with a grave and beautiful precision.

"Master, the Great One says that the white woman stays. Let your friend return down the waters without her."

The Honourable Tony lifted his brows.

"Stays with the Great One, Ghundi?"

"With the Great One, Master."

The Honourable Tony glanced pensively at the dark bulk of the palace.

"So much for that!" he murmured gently. "Bear my compliments to the Great One, Ghundi. Is all in readiness at the beach?"

"The raft waits, Master. Go swiftly, or your friend will stumble in the night."

"Excellent advice! Latch the door after you, and on your way, William; I'll come as far as the beach. No, this way. The air feels cool as water, doesn't it? Smell that breeze; it's straight down from the jungle."

"It smells of poison," cried young Ledyard fiercely. "The whole place is rank with it—it's crawling. Calvert—Calvert, come back with me. I swear I'll never let you regret it; I swear——"

"And here we are. Gad, we're just in time if you want to tell the raft from the river. In you

go, my lad, and off you go. Lord love you for coming!"

"Calvert, I won't—I'm not going."

The Honourable Tony laid his hands lightly and strongly on the boy's shoulders, pushing him relentlessly toward the water.

"My dearest kid, don't be an ass. If you stayed one minute longer, you'd ruin the best memory of my life. I mean it. Off with you." . . .

He stood with one arm flung up in a reassuring gesture of farewell until the bamboo raft with its sandy-haired occupant vanished around the dim curve of the river. The night was falling with the velvet precipitation of the tropics—even while he stood its dark mantle was about him; new perfumes stole from its folds, troubling and exquisite, and one by one its jewels shone out—the small, ruddy fires of the *kampong*, an occasional lantern swinging hurriedly by and, square by square, the distant windows in the Sultan's residence, flashing aggressive as a challenge. He lowered his arm somewhat abruptly. Very gay to-night, the Sultan's residence; gayer than was its wont—gay as for some high festivity. The imperial Bhakdi was not greatly given to such prodigal display of oil and tallow; his mentor eyed the illumination critically, and then, with the old indifferent shrug,

swung leisurely off through the blackness toward the shadow deeper than the surrounding shadows that was home. He ran lightly up the crazy steps, felt for the latch—and drew back his hand as sharply as though he had touched hot coal. He had touched something more startling than any coal; the groping fingers had closed on emptiness. The latched door was open.

"Ghundi!" His voice cut sharply into the dark space that a few minutes before had been a room, green-cushioned, white-matted, commonplace, and serene. "Ghundi!"

Silence—haunted and ominous. The Honourable Tony leaned against the door frame and addressed the shadows.

"Of course, this is frightfully jolly! I'd have laid out a mat with welcome drawn up all over it if I'd had the faintest notion of what was in store for me—though that would have been a bit superfluous, come to think of it! You seem to have managed nicely without any mat at all. I hope you've made yourself quite at home?"

Silence. The Honourable Tony did not move, but he raised his voice.

"Mrs. Potts! I say, I hope you've made yourself quite at home?"

From the hushed depths came a small, frantic commotion.

"Ah, be qui-*yet!*" The desperate whisper came toward him in a rush. "Be qui-*yet,* I do implore!"

"Oh, my dear girl, come now! Silence may be golden, and all that—and naturally I'm enormously flattered at finding you lurking around the corners of my humble abode, but before we do away with the human voice entirely, why not have a go at straightening out one or two minor matters? The first being just precisely what in the devil you're doing here instead of on Ledyard's boat?"

"Meestaire Honable Tonee, on my knees I pray to you, be more quiyet! Lissen, lissen, come more close. I tell you evairy thing. No, come more close. Do not let them see—do not, do not let them hear. Ah—ah—more sof', more still! So!"

Out of the blackness the suppliant whisper drew him like a taut thread—nearer, nearer—he stumbled over something small and yielding, swore and laughed in the same quick breath, and felt two fluttering hands clutch at him, closing over his wrist in frantic protest.

"No, no, do not laff—hush, do not laff, I say."

"Well, but what in *hell?*" inquired the Honourable Tony, softly enough to satisfy even his exigent audience. "No, I say, drop it, there's a good little lunatic! I'm after the matches; they're on this table somewhere——"

"Honable Tonee—lissen—eef one of those matches you should light, we die."

"Oh, we do, do we? Well, death will be a blessed relief for one of us and a just retribution for the other. Why hasn't someone killed you for using that simply frightful stuff long before this, Daisy?"

"What stuff ees that? Ah, ah, Honable Tonee, I am a-frighten to die; I am a-frighten!"

"But after all, that hardly alters the merits of the case, now does it? Though even death doesn't seem to quite expiate the crime! Do you bathe in it?"

"But in *what?* Lissen—I tell you, lissen——"

"Lissen yourself, my child; it's I who am going to tell you. Apparently you've had no guidance whatever so far, but precisely here is where you acquire a guardian angel. Daisy, little girls have been boiled in oil for less than using one drop of the noxious fluid in which you are drowning."

"No, I do not onnerstan'—no, but lissen, I beg, I pray—you mus' hide me, Honable Tonee, you mus' hide me fas' before he come to keel us both."

"Hide you?" The Honourable Tony yielded to unregenerate mirth above the terrified murmurs of protest. "My dear Potts, you might precisely as well ask a thimble to hide a perfume factory! Actually, you know, when I was clean

over there by the door, it fairly bowled me off my feet."

"Hush—oh, hush—eet ees my pairfume?"

"It is indeed—it most emphatically is."

"You could know eet from that door?"

"I could know it from the far edge of the *kampong*."

"Then they fin' me—then, oh, they fin' me!"

At the sick terror of that small wail the Honourable Tony stirred.

"I say, you're not really frightened, are you?"

"I am vairy frighten' to die," his visitor told him simply. "You are not?"

"Well, I'd be jolly well let down, I can tell you! It would upset my schedule no end; so if it's all right with you we might go on living for a bit."

"But that I think we cannot do," said the small, chilled whisper.

"The deuce you say!" commented the Honourable Tony pensively. He swung himself up onto the table, and sat staring into the darkness for a minute, his head cocked on one side, swinging his long legs over its edge. "Look here, suppose we stop entertaining each other and bag a few of the blood-curdling facts. What do you say to diving in again at the beginning of all the small talk, and telling me just exactly what you're doing trotting into my humble dwelling and turning it into a

cross between a madhouse and a cemetery? The woman's touch, so long lacking, what? Do stop crying; nothing in the whole world's worth crying about like that—not even that infernal perfume!"

"I cry becaus' vairy greatly I am afraid," she explained gently. "An' vairy greatly I am sorry that I bring to your poor abode such pain an' grief an' danger. I make you all excuse; I did not know wair else to go—no, truly, truly I did not know——"

"But why in the name of grief didn't you go to the boat?"

"Honable Tonee, eet was gone, eet was gone!"

"Oh, rot! The boat was here until a few minutes ago. Look here, my dear child, if you're trying any of your little tricks on me, I can save you any amount of time and trouble by tipping you off to the fact that you're heading straight for a wash-out. This whole performance looks most frightfully dodgy and I'm beginning to be pretty fairly fed up. From brother Manuelo on——"

The limp bundle shivering quietly beneath his fingers shivered more deeply still, and sighed.

"About Manuelo, that was a lie."

"Well, it's gratifying to have my worst suspicions confirmed, naturally! But of all the confounded cheek——"

"Eet was jus' a lie that Manuelo he was my

brothair. Manuelo, he ees the belove' of my heart."

"The devil he is!" The Honourable Tony's voice was edged with mild interest. "And may I ask why the brotherly transformation?"

"What ees that?"

"Why the lie, Daisy?"

"Because men, too well do I know them. Ah, ah, too well! Eef I say to Meestair Ledyar', to that black devil out from hell, to your own self, Honable Tonee, that eet ees tryin' to save the belove' of my heart that I go crezzy in my haid and die two thousan' death from terror, you think they lissen to me then? You think they help me then? Well, me, I think not."

"And me, I think not, too!" agreed the Honourable Tony promptly. "Quite a student of human nature, in your quiet way, aren't you, Daisy? I say, do let's have some light on this! I don't think that Manuelo would fancy it for a moment if he knew that we were all huddled up here in the pitch-black whispering things at each other."

"Manuelo, one thousan' time he have tell me eef he fin' me with a man alone, he cut the heart out from our body."

"Perhaps it's all for the best that he's going to remain in the tin mines," suggested the Honour-

able Tony philosophically. "No cloud without a silver lining, what? However, I'm going to humour Manuelo to the extent of seeing that we have all the light that a large lamp can cast over what I trust is going to prove a brief interview. Do stop whimpering, there's a good child!"

"Honable Tonee, thees lamp you mus' not light. See, no longer I cry—no longer I make one soun' —only thees lamp you mus' not light. No, wait, you do not onnerstan'——"

"You're putting it conservatively, Daisy!"

"Wait, then, I tell you—all I make clear—but no light. Eef there is a light, he know you are here; eef he know you are here, he know that I, too, am here—an' eef he know I, too, am here, then we die. That ees clear now?"

"Well, frankly, it still leaves a bit to be desired. One or two minor gaps—who is it that's going to slay us when he comes to the conclusion that we're both here, Daisy? Manuelo?"

"No, no, no—Manuelo, I tell you, he dyin' in those tin mines."

"Oh—well, then, candidly, you have me. If it isn't Manuelo, my mind is a perfect blank as to who would profit by doing away with us. Unless —you haven't misled me about Mr. Potts, have you?"

"Ah, what now?"

"Mr. Potts is still dead?"

"Honable Tonee, eet ees not well to mock—eet ees not well to laff! He was dead like I say; eet ees not good to mock the dead."

"He has my abject apologies. But that brings us back to the murderer."

"Murderair?"

"By all means—the cove who's going to dash in and dispose of us if I light the lamp."

"Honable Tonee, you know well eet ees he, that mos' accurse' black devil of all black devils to whom I pray to save my Manuelo."

"Daisy, it can't be our royal Bhakdi that you're referring to in these unmeasured terms?"

And suddenly she clung to him, weeping abjectly through her clicking teeth.

"No, no, nevair say hees name—nevair spik it! Wair ees there I can be hid—wair ees there I can be hid far away? I am a-frighten to die—Manuelo—ah-h—Manuelo!"

The Honourable Tony felt for the small, untidy silken head in the darkness, patting it with deft but reluctant fingers.

"My dear kid, if it's Bhakdi who's been frightening you into this state, it's a good deal simpler than one, two, three to straighten it out. Tell you what: you curl up in this wicker chair—there, put your head back, and take a long breath—and I'll

stroll over to the royal residence and put the fear of God and England into the little blighter. Don't howl; it's going to be absolutely all serene, I swear——"

But at that the soft convulsion of weeping deepened to mysterious vehemence.

"No, no, nevair stir—nevair—nevair! He mus' not know I come here; he mus' not know I have see you—eef he know that, you die——"

"Daisy, you've been running in too much to the cinemas. What you need is a good stiff dose of 'Alice in Wonderland.' 'Off with his head', what? My good child, the little bounder eats out of my hand—either or both. He——"

"No, no, no, he keel you," the frantic, obstinate little voice stammered in desperate urgency. "That he tell to me—that he say to me—he keel you."

"But *in* the name of the Lord, why?"

"Becaus' I tell to heem that if once more he lay on me hees black an' dirty han's I go to you for help. Ah, Maria, hees han's—ah, Manuelo, Manuelo!"

"Daisy—Daisy, this is all simply too good to be true; no, honestly, I'm wrenching my mind out of its socket trying to believe you. You'll swear he said that he'd kill me? But why? Why?"

"Becaus' ovair me he ees gone crezzy." The

tear-sodden whisper was charged with mournful pride. "Ovair me he ees gone crezzy mad. He tell to me that he marry with me—that the jewels from hees las' two wive he give to me for prez-zens——"

The Honourable Tony yielded to another gale of delighted mirth.

"Well, upon my word, you couldn't ask for anything fairer than that! Why not accept?"

"Hush—hush—more still! You have forgot Manuelo?"

"To be entirely candid, my child, I had forgot Manuelo. It's delightful to know that you haven't, however! Well, but then how in the world did you get here?"

"I have jump out from a window."

"From a—— Daisy, you're making this up!"

"No, no—for why, for why should I make thees up, Honable Tonee? Lissen, he have lock me up in a great ogly room, until I come back into my sense, he say, becaus' so bad I cry an' scream, an' cry an' scream—lissen, so then I jump from out that window. Ah, ah, Dios, eet was too high, that window; my haid eet ache, my haid eet ache so bad, while I have crawl an' crawl through all the black—but that boat he was gone away, Honable Tonee, an' me, I am a-frighten till I die, becaus' I do not know wair to go. Lissen, I am a mos' bad

girl—I bring to you danger an' worry, but my haid eet hurt, and I do not know wair——"

"My dear Daisy, you knew exactly." The Honourable Tony administered a final reassuring pat, and swung off from the table. "You showed really extraordinary judgment, not to go into the matter of taste. This is Liberty Hall, my priceless child; you should feel entirely at home with practically no effort. Before you settle down definitely, however, we might run over our lines in case the Imperial Bhakdi takes it into his head to drop in on us before we've worked out any very elaborate campaign for Liberty and Manuelo, the heart's belove'. D'you think he's liable to dash over before I could hunt up Ghundi and a sampan, and head you down stream?"

"No, no—no, no, no—do not leave me! No, I die when you shall leave me!"

"Oh, come!" remonstrated the Honourable Tony blithely. "That's spreading it on fairly thick, you know—I don't believe that Manuelo would pass over that kind of thing for a minute. Look here, I'll be back before you can get through Jack Robinson——"

"No! No!"

It was indecent for any living creature to show such abject terror, more like a tortured and

frenzied kitten than a sane human being. The Honourable Tony shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, it's quite all right with me, you know! I simply thought if the little beggar was roving about it might be tidier and simpler to get you out of the way—though it would be any amount jollier if you were around, naturally. We could do something nice with a screen—or there's the other room; on the whole, that has more possibilities. By Gad, we can get some simply stunning effects, with practically no trouble at all. I've an automatic in there."

"Ah-h-h!"

"My dear kid, don't go off like that again, or I won't let you put a finger on it. In the extremely remote event that I am dragged kicking and screaming from the scene of action, however, you could do some very amusing tricks with it, including potting our imperial friend. Are you a good shot, Daisy?"

"No, no—what you say now? Do not let heem come; do not let heem—no thing could I shoot—no thing——"

"Well, there's one thing that any duffer in the world can shoot," said the Honourable Tony soothingly. "There's absolutely no use shaking like that; not as long as any stupid little girl in the world can shoot herself! It's a simply ripping

pistol, Daisy." He put one arm about her, light and close, and she relaxed against it with a strange, comforted little moan. "So that's that; of course there's not half a chance in a thousand that the little beggar won't grovel all over the place; I'll tell him that if he lays one finger on a British subject, I'll take jolly good care that England turns it into an international matter——"

"Oh, for that, he does not care!"

"How do you mean, doesn't care?"

"No, for Englan' he does not care—no, not that! When I say to heem that great Englan' will protec' me, he laff right out an' say, 'Englan', bah!'"

"Oh, he said that, did he?" inquired the Honourable Tony grimly. "Well, that's not a pretty thing for any fat little Sultan to say." He grinned suddenly into the darkness. "'Englan', bah!' Come to think of it, I've murmured something fairly like it myself once or twice. But then I'm not a fat little Sultan; I happen to be an Englishman! Daisy, will you swear not to howl if I tell you something?"

"What now?"

"Well, now it begins to look as though things were going to happen. There's a fair-sized cluster of lights bearing down this way from the royal imperial palace at a good fast clip, and I'm rather

inclined to think that it's time for little girls that have heart's beloveds in the mines to be trotting off to a more secluded spot. How about it?"

"Yes, yes, I go." There was a strange and touching docility in the small voice. "Wair now do I go, Honable Tonee?"

"Here—this way—where's your hand? Quiet, now; sure you aren't going to howl?"

"No; no."

"That's right; here's the door—nothing in the world to howl about, naturally. Wait, and I'll find you a chair; or you can curl up on the bed if you'd rather. That comfortable?"

"Oh, that—that is mos' comfortable."

"Good. Now for God's sake, emulate the well-known mouse! The revolver's on the table. No—no—don't touch it now. Oh, Lucifer, that perfume! It'll be our ruin—a headless jackass could smell it in Singapore. Here, let's have your handkerchief—quick! Steady on there. We're about to receive callers, Daisy!"

There was the sound of feet on the rickety steps—the sound of hands at the outer door. The Honourable Tony bent down swiftly; kicked off one shoe—the other—ripped off the white linen coat and the blue silk scarf, and strode leisurely across the threshold of his bedroom door with his head on one side and his hands in his pockets.

"What in the devil?" he inquired amiably of the bronze statue standing in the pool of light at the head of the stairs. The statue stirred, and behind it other lights gleamed and danced in darkness. "Oh—it's you, Ghundi! What's the row?"

"Master, the Great One bids that you bring the woman and come swiftly to the palace."

"Bring what woman?" inquired the Honourable Tony, lazily diverted. "I say, Ghundi, the Great One hasn't been having a go at that brandy again, has he?"

The statue did not move but in the pool of light its eyes shone, eloquent and imploring.

"Master, jests will not serve you now. She was seen to enter here by the little son of the head-beater. The Great One says to make all haste."

"Well, inform the Great One from me with cordial salutations that haste is totally foreign to my nature," remarked the Honourable Tony affably. "If the largest tiger in the jungle was sitting a paw's length off, I couldn't possibly move rapidly—it's a most frightful handicap, I can tell you! As for the little son of the head-beater, let him be well beaten and allowed no fish for three days, or he will grow up to be as great a liar as his father. Shocking what these infants go in for! Did he mention the lady's name?"

"Master, master, it is well known that it is the

white woman who came up the waters with your friend. You do ill to delay."

"Ghundi, it's never Mrs. Potts? Not the ravishing Mrs. Potts? You know, that's pretty priceless in itself. Now suppose you collect all your little playmates out there and totter back to the Great One and inform him as gracefully as possible that the ineffable Potts has gone down the waters that she came up, reluctantly escorted by Mr. Billee Ledyar'. Present my condolences. She just caught the boat by the skin of her little white teeth. I agree with the Great One that it's a thousand pities that she caught it at all."

"Master, I am your servant. I have served you well—I have loved you better. My heart is yours to use for your meat, my skin for your carpet; for them I care nothing. If I return without you, they slay me—if I remain with you, they slay me—it is all one. But you—you are my master—you are my son—you are my father. Delay no longer; the woman was seen to enter here—she has not come out."

The Honourable Tony did not stir from his careless station before the bedroom door, but something leapt across the guarded space to that dark and lonely figure—something more warm, more friendly, more reassuring than any touch of hands.

"Ghundi, there are two fellows this side of

Heaven that I'd give a good bit to take there with me when I go. That sandy-haired young lunatic who came up the waters is one of them—and you're the other. Now cut along back to the Great One, like a good fellow, and tell him that I was as good as tucked in for the night when you found me, with a nice little flicker of fever. If I wasn't cagy about this dashed night air I'd nip over with you and explain; as it stands, I'll trot over the first thing in the morning. Good-night, old chap; wish the Great One happy dreams."

Ghundi's grave voice was suddenly heavy with despair.

"Master, she is here. The air about us cries it to all who breathe."

"Absolutely sickening, what?" agreed the Honourable Tony. "Jockey Club, I understand. I picked up her beastly little handkerchief on the beach path, coming back from the boat—it's fairly sopped in it. Here, catch—I was going to send it back to her, but God knows when it would reach her. The Great One might fancy it; compliments of the season—corking souvenir, what?"

Ghundi stared down at the wet white ball in his clenched fist.

"Master—I was told to search——"

"And that'll be about all of *that*," remarked the Honourable Tony. A peculiarly ingratiating smile

curved the corners of his lips, and he took both hands from his pockets and made an expressive gesture toward the long windows above the water. "A little more chatter like that and out you go to the crocodiles. Come on now, cut along like a nice chap—my head's buzzing no end, and I'm mad for sleep. I'll have my tea at seven on the tick. And some of that jolly sticky preserve——"

The dark, troubled face was lit suddenly by a smile, gleaming white as a benediction, grave and tender and indulgent.

"Where you go," said Ghundi, "there may I be to serve you! Farewell, little master."

He turned back to the dancing lights below him with a sharp word of command, and as quietly as he had come was gone, passing silently down the rickety steps into the night. There was a swift murmur of protest from the waiters, quelled; the light shuffle of feet; the rustle of parted leaves—silence. The Honourable Tony stood for a moment listening for any echo of the small dying sounds—whistled the opening bars of "Where Do We Go From Here, Boys?" twice over with fine accuracy and restraint, shoved open the bedroom door, and yielded himself unreservedly to joyous retrospection.

"My word, fairly neat, eh, Daisy? What price the bit about the handkerchief? And the buzzing

head, what? I swear I had no idea I'd be so good. Fancy what a loss to the stage—or Scotland Yard—no, no, more sport keeping out of Scotland Yard; well, then, so that's that. Now what?"

There was a small sound that might have been a shiver, and a whisper, strange and lonely as a dream, answered him.

"Now then, farewell, Honable Tonee."

"Farewell? Thinking of leaving me, Daisy?"

"Yes. Now I am thinkin'—of leavin' you."

"My poor kid, you'll shiver your pretty teeth out if you keep up like this; I swear I ought to be drawn and quartered for a thumping brute. After all, it isn't as much of a lark for you as it is for me, is it? Now just what *are* we going to do about you?"

"Honable Tonee, eet ees not for me I shiver; eet ees for you. Becaus' you do not onnerstan'—becaus' you laff—becaus' you do not know that all, all ees end. That is mos' terrible—that you who are good an' great an' love' by all those Saints do not know that eet ees end. Of all those Saints and you I ask pardon—I ask pardon, pardon that thees I have done to you——"

"My dear little lunatic, you've done nothing in the world to me; the blighter knows that if he laid a finger on me he'd be as good as cutting his throat. While I'm not much given to swanking about it,

half of the big sticks in England are my cousins and my uncles and my aunts, and though it's rather a grief to us all, they'd simply chew him up if he administered as much as a scratch to anything as sacred as a Bolingham hide. No, I'm a good deal righter than rain and you take a weight off my mind about the sentiments of all those Saints; the question before the house is, what about you?"

"Me? Oh, me, eet ees no mattair. Me, I am through."

"Daisy, I'm just a bit afraid you're right. We might as well face the fact at the start that I'm no match for the entire Imperial army, even if an important item of their defence does consist of green panties. You wouldn't consider chucking it?"

"How, chuckin'?"

"You don't think that Manuelo would understand if you took the two last wives' jewels and——"

"Ah," moaned the little voice in the darkness, "that ees a wicked, that ees a black an' ogly thing to say. Me, I am no good—me, I am no good at all—but that you should have nevair say to me——"

"My dear," said the Honourable Tony gently, "you're as good as gold, and I'm a black-hearted scoundrel that Manuelo ought to flog from here to

his tin mines. In this world or the next, he has my congratulations; tell him from me that he's a lucky devil, won't you? Now then, I'm off for the other room. I'll light the lamp, and give a cracking good imitation of an earnest reader for the benefit of any callers. In case it doesn't meet with the proper applause—just in case, you know—here's the revolver. You might bolt the door after I'm gone; that way you'll have any amount of time. Not going to be lonely, are you? You can hear me just as well as though I still were in the room. Moreover, I'm leaving a lady to take care of you."

"A ladee?"

"The Duchess of Bolingham. Feel this little black frame? Well, she's in there; hold on tight to her. You two are going to adore each other."

"No, but I do not onnerstan'; what, what ees thees?"

"This is my mother, Daisy; her first name is Biddy. I think she's going to want you to call her by her first name."

"But she ees daid, your mothair?"

"Dead? That's the most idiotic description of Biddy; however, there may be something in what you say, though you'll never get her to admit it. Now, then, quite all right? Sure? Good-bye, little Daisy."

"Honable Tonee."

He had to bend his head to catch that faint and wavering whisper.

"Yes?"

"Honable Tonee, becaus' thees room eet ees so black an' still—not, not that I am a-frighten, but becaus' thees room eet ees so black an' still, would you be so vairy kin' to kiss me good-bye? Manuelo—Manuelo, he would onnerstan'. You do not think that ladee would be angery?"

The Honourable Tony bent his bright head to the dark one, and laid his gay lips swiftly and surely on the small painted mouth.

"That lady would be terrible in anger if I didn't. Daisy, what nice perfume! Nicest I ever smelled in all my life. I'm going to get bottles and bottles of it. All right now, little thing? Good-night then—Biddy, you look after her; show her all the prettiest places up there—mind the two of you keep out of mischief! Slip the bolt behind me, Daisy."

With a last touch on her hair, light and caressing as his voice, he was gone through the darkness. He pulled the door to behind him noiselessly, and stood leaning against it for a moment with bowed head, listening. Silence—a faint patter of feet—the heavy grating of the bolt driven home. He raised his head.

"Good girl!" said the Honourable Tony clearly.

He swung across to the table, felt for the matches, and lit the lamp deftly and swiftly, pulling the long chair into its friendly aura and distributing the cushions with a rapid dexterity that belied the lethargy that he had maintained tigers incapable of disturbing. But then, a little wind had just passed through the quiet room—a little wind that blew in heavy with darkness and fragrance and something else—heavy with a distant murmur of voices, and far-off footsteps coming nearer through the night. It passed as it came, but the flame in the lamp flickered and burned brighter, and the flame that danced in the eyes of the gentleman reclining in the long chair flickered and burned brighter, too, though they were discreetly lowered over the account of a highly unsavory Bazaar murder in a two-month-old paper from Singapore. Even when the footsteps were on the rickety stairs he continued to read; even when they were on the threshold he only bent his head a little lower, intent and absorbed; even when the knocks rang out, ominous and insistent, he did not lift those dancing eyes. He flipped over the first page of the Singapore paper with a dexterous thumb and finger, and lifted his voice in welcome leavened with surprise.

"Come in!" called the Honourable Tony to

those who stood in darkness. And the door opened and they came in.

First there came a small, plump, swarthy gentleman in immaculate white linen of an irreproachable cut. He had small neat feet shod in the shiniest of patent-leather boots, and small fat hands adorned with three superb emeralds, and a set of highly unpleasant little cat whiskers curling into a grizzled gray at the ends. About his throat was a scarlet watered ribbon from which dangled a star as glittering as a Christmas tree ornament, and about his head was wound a turban of very fine red silk pierced by a brooch in which crouched another emerald large as a pigeon egg, flawed and sinister and magnificent. In one fat little hand he held a pair of white kid gloves and a small handkerchief badly crumpled; in the other a swagger stick of ebony banded with smooth gold. He walked on the tips of his patent-leather toes, and behind him came ten gigantic figures in incredible green uniforms with gold-laced jackets that were debtors to the Zouaves, and fantastic caps strapped under their chins reminiscent of the organ-grinder's monkey and the dancing vaudeville bellboy. Lanterns light as bubbles swung from their great paws and in the gilded holsters at their waists the mother-of-pearl handles of the famous automatics gleamed like the Milky Way.

They padded behind their master, silent as huge cats, and smiled at one another like delighted children. His Imperial Majesty, the Sultan Bhakdi, accompanied by the Royal Body Guard, was making a call on the British Adviser.

The British Adviser rose easily to his feet.

"Your Majesty!" he saluted, with precisely the correct inflection of gratified amazement.

"Excellency!" His Majesty's accent was a trifle more British than the Honourable Tony's, but he purred in his throat, which is not done. "We were alarmed by the good Ghundi's report of your health. You suffer?"

"Oh, Ghundi's overdone it!" protested the Honourable Tony, all courteous regret, but the carved dimples danced. "I'm no end sorry that you've had all this bother. It's frightfully decent of you to give it a thought; nothing in the world the matter but a rather stiff nip of fever. I was going to turn in in another minute, and sleep it off. I beg any number of pardons for this costume; it's hardly one that I'd have chosen for such an honour."

"Hardly!" agreed the Sultan cordially. "Hardly! However, as the visit was unheralded, and as the defects of the costume may be so easily remedied, we dismiss it gladly. Come, we waive formality; we have been bored most damnably

without you and the excellent bridge. The mountain comes to Mahomet; my good Mahomet, on with your boots, on with your coat, and out with your cards. We will drive off this pestilential fever with three good rubbers and four good drinks. Ahmet will fetch your coat. It is in your room? Ahmet!"

The Honourable Tony moved more swiftly than Ahmet. He laid one hand on the handle of the bedroom door, but he did not turn it.

"I'm absolutely sick over making such an ass of myself," he said with pleasing candour. "But I do honestly feel too rotten bad to last out even a hand. I'll be fit as a fiddle in the morning, and entirely at Your Majesty's disposal; but for to-night I'm going to ask you to excuse me."

"But to-night we will most certainly not excuse you," His Imperial Majesty replied amiably. "No, no, on the contrary. Rather not, as you say. To-night, Excellency, we are quite through. We have been culpably lenient and indulgent in the past; we have overlooked one hundred stupid impertinences and five hundred impertinent stupidities, but your bridge—your bridge was impeccable and we have long desired to perfect our game. Now, however, you outreach our patience. Stand aside, I beg you. When Ahmet fetches your Excellency's coat and your Excellency's

boots, he will also fetch your Excellency's lady."

The Honourable Tony gave a shout of astounded delight.

"My hat!" he cried. "But this is simply gorgeous. All this time that I've been ragging you you've been plotting a bloody revenge?"

"Revenge," replied His Imperial Majesty, with an impatient flick of the white gloves, "is an incident. I wish the woman. Stand aside!"

"It's a dream," decided the Honourable Tony, cocking his head with Epicurean satisfaction. "No, by Heaven, it's better than a dream. Just what are you going to do if I don't stand aside?"

"Shoot you where you stand. Come, come—we are over-patient."

The Honourable Tony sighed beatifically, as one whose cup of joy was full to overflowing.

"Oh, come now, if you ask me, you're dashed impatient. Shooting me down in this damn casual way—what d'you think the British Government's going to make of it?"

"Nothing," replied the British Government's loyal ally blandly. "Nothing whatsoever. In due time the proper authorities will be informed that you were lost overboard on an expedition after crocodiles, and owing to the unfortunate proclivities of those depraved reptiles, your body was not recovered. I do not imagine that the loss will af-

flict the Government so deeply as you imagine."

The Honourable Tony's manner changed abruptly from enchanted amusement to the cold insolence of a badly spoiled young man dismissing his valet.

"And that's enough," he said. "Take your army and be off. You're dashed amusing, but you overdo it. If an apology from you were worth the breath you draw, I'd have one out of you for the country that I represent and its representative. As it is, I give you fair warning to clear out; I'm about fed up."

"Till I count three to stand aside," remarked His Imperial Majesty conversationally, abandoning the royal "we" as though it were no longer necessary in so informal a discussion, "I shall regret the bridge."

"You can count to three thousand if you can get that far," the Honourable Tony informed him politely. "But while you're about it you might remember that we're in the twentieth century, not the Adelphi Theatre."

"We are in Asia," said His Imperial Majesty. "Life is good, Excellency, and Death, I am told, is a long and dreary affair. The woman is not worth it—a gutter rat out of the music halls. It is her good fortune to amuse me. Stand aside, I beg!"

"My mother was from the music halls," said the Honourable Tony. "I have half a mind to mop up the floor with you before I turn in."

"You are a brave man," said His Imperial Majesty equably. "And a fool." He turned to the black and emerald giants, and they quivered slightly. "Attention!"

The giants ceased quivering and stood very straight.

"Ready!" said Bhakdi softly. The pearl-handled automatics flashed like jewels.

"Aim!" said Bhakdi with a flick of the handkerchief toward the slim figure framed in the doorway.

"You ought to be jolly grateful to me for teaching you all those nice words," remarked the figure reproachfully. "They sound simply corking when you snap 'em out like that."

"I count," said Bhakdi. "One."

"I wish you could see yourselves," said the Honourable Tony admiringly. "For all the world like a lot of comic-opera pirates panting to get into the chorus when the tenor says 'go.' 'For-I'm-the-big-bad-black-faced-chief'—you know the kind of thing."

"Two," said Bhakdi.

"I say, you *are* going it!" cried the British Asviser. In the gleam from the lanterns his hair

was ruffled gold and his eyes black mischief. "Aren't you afraid of its being a bit of a let-down to the Imperial Guard after all this?"

"Three!" said Bhakdi, and he flicked the handkerchief again. "Fire!"

There was a rip and a rattle of sound along the green line—from the other side of the bolted door there came a faint reply, precise and sharp as an echo. The Honourable Tony sagged forward to his knees, still clutching at the handle, his face lit with an immense, an incredulous amazement.

"By God!" he whispered. "By God, you've done it!"

And suddenly in the lean curve of his cheek the dimples danced once more, riotous and unconquered.

"I say," he murmured, "I say, Biddy, that's—that's a good one! Comic opera, what? That—that's a good one—on me——"

His fingers slipped from the door, and he was silent.

THE END

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